

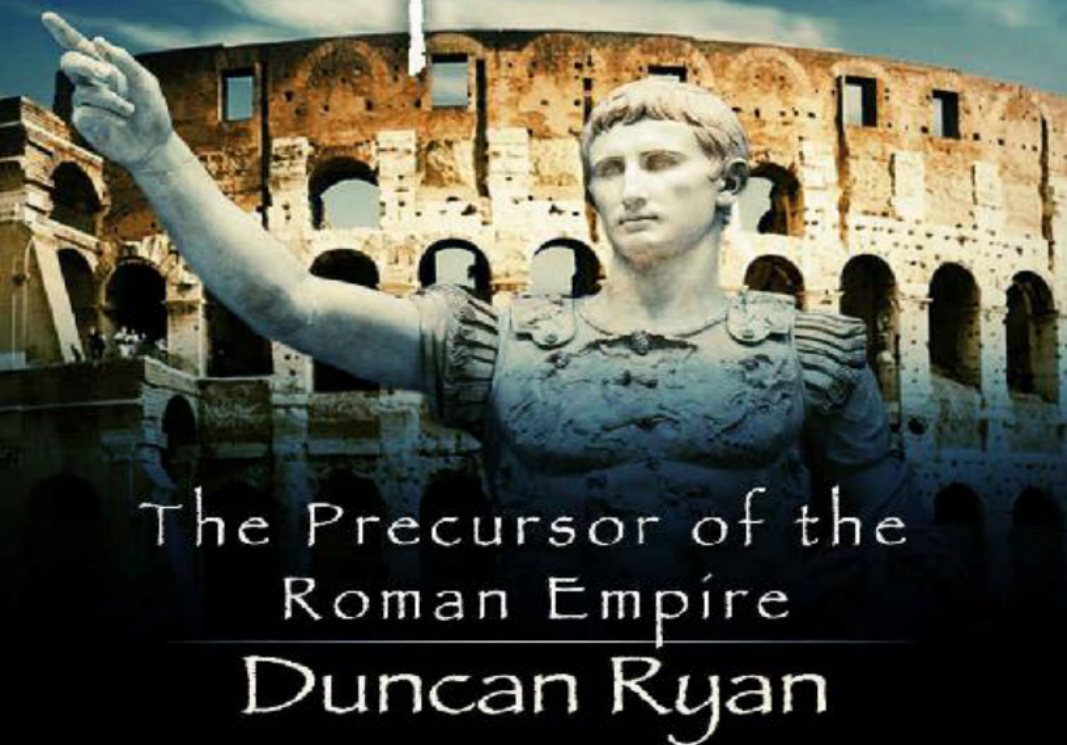
# **The Roman Republic: The Precursor of the Roman Empire**

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# The **ROMAN** Republic



The Precursor of the  
Roman Empire  
Duncan Ryan

# **The Roman Republic**

## **The Precursor of the Roman Empire**

### **Introduction**

In the study of history, no political entity (save perhaps the dynasties of Egypt) has become as well-known and universally recognized as the Roman Empire. The dominant power in the western world for 500 years, the Roman Empire produced such illustrious rulers as Augustus, Tiberius, Trajan, Hadrian and Septimius Severus, political and military leaders whose names are familiar to nearly everyone in the world to this very day. However, before the appointment of Augustus as emperor and the forging of the empire as we today know it, another incarnation of Roman power held sway. This was the Republic, a period of Roman history that lasted from the overthrow of Rome's monarchy in or around 509 BCE until the formal

establishment of the empire in 27 BCE.

The Republic was also the period of time during which Rome would grow into the vast hegemonic empire that most people today are familiar with. Wars fought throughout the Mediterranean basin under the Republic would carry the military and political power of Rome far and wide, eventually creating the empire that would later return to rule by a single central authority in the form of the Roman emperors. Thus, the Republic was a crucial period in Rome's history that would set the stage for the full glories of imperial power. Despite having such a massive impact on the more familiar history of imperial Rome, the Republic has received comparatively little interest in modern times, except among those who have made relatively thorough studies of ancient history. In the more popular mind, this developmental stage of Rome's history is often glossed over with little detail or context or, worse yet, ignored altogether in favor of an interest only in later Roman history.



*Illustration 1: A Roman temple dating from the time of the Republic*

Be this as it may, the history of the Roman Republic is one that is important to understanding the political and military institutions that later were inherited by the empire. Beyond this importance, the history of the Republic, though perhaps of less popular interest, is a fascinating historical era in and of itself. This short historical work will address this period of Rome's history, seeking to provide a fairly detailed description of the development of Rome during this time that will at the same time be accessible to those without prior specialized knowledge of Roman history.

## Section One

# The Origin and Early Years of the Republic

Though the Republic would be the most important phase of Rome's history with regards to the expansion of its power into new lands, it was not the earliest. Prior to the establishment of the Roman Republic was a little-understood phase of the city-state's history known simply as the Roman Monarchy. This period allegedly lasted from 753 BCE, the traditional year in which Romans believed their city had been founded by its first king, Romulus, until about 509 BCE, when the monarchy was overthrown and the republican form of government instituted in its place. Of the monarchical period of Roman history, there is little that can be said with certainty. Although later historians would do their best to record supposed details of the years that were spanned by this period, there are no known historical accounts contemporary with the Roman Monarchy. This, unfortunately, leaves much of the historical context that would have surrounded the move toward the Republic in a state of great uncertainty.

The traditional representation of the founding of the Republic in later Roman historical writings posited that it originated in the

downfall of the last king of Rome, a man named Lucius Tarquinius Superbus. If this traditional history is accurate (a position that should be taken only very tentatively), then the Senate, which would eventually become the primary legislative body of Rome, already existed as a council of advisers to the kings at this time. According to the historical accounts of much later Roman writers, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus engaged in a despotic reign that saw the deaths of many of Rome's most prominent nobles and many members of the Senate. In response, a revolution was staged in which the king and the royal family were overthrown and exiled, clearing a path for the establishment of the Roman Republic, which would be headed by two primary legislative bodies. The first, the Centuriate Assembly, was a council made up of soldiers and which designated members into subgroups by economic class. The second, the Curiate Assembly, was a popular assembly that, though probably very powerful at the beginning of the Roman Republic, would soon lose its position and be largely incorporated into the Centuriate Assembly. The Senate, at this time, was relatively weak, but would grow vastly in power over time to become the principle legislative body of Rome.

Another, possibly more likely, version of the events leading up to the creation of the Republic has been put forward by modern historical scholars. This version proposes that the fall of the Roman monarchy came about as a result of foreign wars, rather than through internal strife. At this time, though it was a powerful city-state within central Italy, Rome would have been nowhere near the all-dominating



military power it would become over the subsequent centuries. Other peoples, especially the Etruscans, who were the original great power in Italy, would still have posed a threat to Rome during this time period. An Etruscan invasion is also recorded by later Roman historians as having occurred in or around 508 BCE under the command of Lars Porsena, the Etruscan king of Clusium. This attack, which led to a siege of the city of Rome itself, is recorded to have been related to the ouster of Tarquin, whom Porsena was attempting to return to power as a satellite ruler who would then be beholden to Clusium for his rule. Another possibility, however, is that it was actually the attack of Porsena that resulted in the overthrow of the monarchy in Rome. The hypothesis under this model is that Porsena successfully took Rome and toppled its monarchy, but was unable to hold it due to the massive expenditure of military and economic resources that would have been required to keep Rome as a client city to Clusium. After the forces of Porsena left, under these circumstances, the legislative bodies would have remained as the only legitimate power in Rome.

Whichever version of the story is accurate, we may be fairly certain that the Republic had its roots sometime in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, a time at which great changes were occurring throughout the Mediterranean world. At this point in world history, the remaining great powers of antiquity, Egypt and Assyria, had both declined and given way to two new great powers of the region. The first was the ancient Achaemenid Empire, created by the Persian king Cyrus the

Great. By the time that Rome threw off its monarchy, this great eastern empire stretched from India to western Turkey and down the Mediterranean coast through Palestine and into Egypt. Though this empire was, by far, the superpower of the ancient world at this time, another great power existed much closer to home for the Romans and would have a profound impact on their civilization and ways of life. This power was the loose confederation of city-states in ancient Greece, and it would be from this source that many of the religious, political, military and social ideas of Rome would be drawn.

Much like its foundations, the earliest years of the Republic remain quite enigmatic and poorly understood. What we can, however, say with some degree of certainty about this time is that it would have been dominated almost entirely by Rome's nobles and political elite, known as the Patricians. The Patrician class had been the central power in Rome for most or all of its history up to this point and would retain the power they enjoyed under the monarchy throughout the early years of the Republic. Even though Rome had technically been a monarchy before the supposed overthrow of Tarquin, it took a very unusual form that separated it drastically from the strictly hereditary monarchies that were more common in the ancient world. According to later historical accounts, the king of Rome was a ruler for life, but one that was nominated by the Senate and ratified by the Curiate Assembly, rather than simply someone to whom the title passed upon the death of the previous ruler. Thus, the Senate, which itself was composed entirely of representatives of the noble Patrician class until

a later time in the Roman Republic, held a great deal of power in selecting the kings.

Upon the ending of the monarchy, the Romans established a new institution that would go on to define Roman politics until the collapse of the empire almost a millennium later. This was the political institution of the consuls, two men elected annually who would effectively take on the executive powers previously held by the king. At this time, the consuls were also the chiefs of Rome's judicial authority, giving them an immense amount of power within the Roman state. However, their influence was limited by their one year term, ensuring that no individual person could accumulate total power through the expedient of holding a consulship indefinitely. This division of legislative and executive power within Rome, a key facet of its political structure throughout the rest of its history, seems to have been designed specifically to protect against the rise of a dictator.

According to the traditional Roman history in which an internal overthrow ended the monarchy, one of the men most responsible for the coup, one Lucius Junius Brutus, was one of the first two consuls elected by the Senate in 509 BCE. Brutus (not to be confused with his more famous counterpart and probable descendant of the same name who murdered Julius Caesar centuries later), in order to ensure that Rome's new republican form of government endured, is said to have administered an oath to the citizens of Rome to protect the Republic and never allow another king to come to power. This supposed oath is

more likely apocryphal than an actual historical event, though it underlines nicely the regard in which Roman writers and historians of later eras held both the Republic and Brutus as its principle founder.

During Brutus' term as consul, two other major events are reputed to have taken place. The first was an expansion of the Senate from 200 to 300 members. In the traditional version of the history, this expansion of the Senate also required the replacement of many of its members who had been executed by Tarquin. Indeed, even under the interpretation of the fall of the Roman monarchy as a result of Etruscan or other foreign invasion, this may well have still been the case, as several senators may have been killed in the war. The second was yet another attack on Rome by Etruscan forces, this time led by the deposed Tarquin.

Though the war may or may not truly have involved Tarquin to any substantial degree, it is reasonable to suppose that the Etruscan invasions of 509 BCE (or thereabouts) played out more or less as reported by historians writing in later periods of Roman history. According to what information these later historians were able to gather about the history of their own city's past, the forces of Rome, led by Brutus, met the combined forces of two Etruscan cities, Veii and Tarquinii, at a battle known as the Battle of Silva Arsia. The cause of the battle seems to have been the Etruscan seizure of the Silva Arsia, a large region of forest that supplied timber to many surrounding areas.

Few details of the battle have survived, and even those, owing to how long after the battle they were recorded, should be treated as quite dubious. According to what accounts have survived, Brutus took personal command of the Roman cavalry, leading a cavalry charge that most likely opened the battle, after which the infantry committed itself. During the opening forays of the battle, Brutus was killed, supposedly by his own cousin, Arun, the son of Tarquin. Though one of its great statesmen and commanders was killed, however, Rome still triumphed, regaining control of the Silva Arsia and driving out the Etruscan forces.

It is very likely that after the defeat of the Etruscans at Silva Arsia, Rome would still have had to engage in a fairly consistent stream of minor conflicts with its neighboring states. The great wars in which Rome would have to engage to forge its Mediterranean empire, however, were still in the fairly distant future. Though it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty, it is likely that a period of relative stability set in after the Etruscan invasions. This period would have been one in which the Patrician class largely ruled Rome through the power and wealth which they collectively held.

As has happened so many times in rigidly stratified societies such as Rome in its early Republican era, however, the lower classes were soon to demand a greater role for themselves in the governing and military life of the city. These lower orders of Roman society,

collectively known as the Plebians, had up to this point been given comparatively lesser representation within the ruling of Rome, as only the higher noble classes were eligible for election to the Senate. Though this had been the standard state of affairs presumably since the founding of Rome, the early 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE exacerbated Plebian frustrations with Patrician rule with an economic crisis. If later sources are to be believed, the financial system of Rome had become seeded with bad debt, and almost no restrictions were placed on what a creditor could do to a debtor who had not repaid what he owed. This debt crisis not only served to make Rome economically weak, but also fanned Plebian hatred of the Patricians, who were both richer and better protected against imprisonment or other harsh consequences for failure to repay loans. At the same time, the wars with surrounding tribes in central Italy continued and would soon offer the Plebians their chance to secure better terms and representation for themselves.

The first stage of this move toward increased Plebian participation would come in or about 495 BCE, when Rome was once again at war with three of the other tribal groups in central Italy. Even though the Patricians were the driving force in government and the military command structure, the Roman army was, by necessity, made up largely of commoners (though a certain degree of personal wealth and property was required for military service). When one of these enemies, the Volsci, appeared to be dangerously close to mounting an attack on Rome and its allies, the disgruntled Plebians refused to assemble to fight the enemy. This placed Rome in a precarious

situation which demanded a careful political balancing of internal needs with the pressing necessity of meeting the Volsci threat. For a time, it seems that the Senate and the nobles of Rome simply attempted to reason with the Plebians, as the downfall of Rome at the hands of the Volsci would have affected them just as negatively as the higher classes. Ultimately, however, the Roman government was forced to begin yielding ground, a decision that, though entirely necessary from every political and military perspective, would pave the way for more and more Plebian infringement on the powers previously monopolized by the nobles. In order to satisfy the most pressing concerns of the citizens, the consul Publius Servilius Priscus Structus was chosen by the Senate to deal with the Plebians as he saw fit due to the fact he had been more amicable to their requests than his consular colleague. Servilius offered the Plebians a relief in the form of a release of anyone who was a prisoner due to nonpayment of debts who agreed to serve in the army, as well as immunity from imprisonment for those free debtors who agreed to join. Thus, Servilius swelled the ranks of the Roman military for the fight against the Volscian invaders, who were subsequently defeated.

Though it may have seemed like the crisis had been averted, the actions of Servilius would soon be checked by his colleague Appius, who opposed the debt reliefs on the Plebians. Counteracting Servilius, Appius decreed that imprisonment and arrest were still allowable for nonpaying debtors. The Plebians, seeing themselves betrayed, once again began to voice their discontent with the Senate, which had

allowed Appius to enact his policies over those of Servilius. A political battle within Rome began in which Appius, who commanded the support of the Senate and of the Patrician class in general, wielded almost unilateral power. At the same time, however, another threat was massing against Rome that would once again call for the military action of the Plebians. This threat came in the form of the Sabines, an ancient enemy of Rome in Italy that had fought a long series of wars and even engaged in some limited conflicts with the armies of the Republic since the overthrow of Tarquin. Appius, exercising his authority as consul near the end of his term, attempted to enact a levy of troops and supplies from the citizenry of Rome but was almost roundly rebuffed. As the promises made by Servilius had not been met, the Plebian class was understandably in little mood to render its military assistance once again.

This situation, however gridlocked it may have been, also demonstrates one of the greatest strengths of the Roman Republic. Even though Appius, holding the Senate's favor, had achieved almost complete executive authority over Rome, the one year term of a consul diminished his power in early 494 BCE when the formalities of his office compelled him to relinquish it. It should be understood that Appius, with the backing of the Patricians, was still a powerful figure in Roman civic life. However, he no longer held the kind of supreme authority that had briefly been his after the Senate turned on the Servilius. The new order of business was to assemble a Plebian army capable of besting the Sabines. However, the Plebians who refused to



enlist still had recourse to the common assemblies, especially the Curiate Assembly. This right of direct appeal to fellow citizens was one of the cornerstones of Roman justice, and not even the overbearing executive power Appius had held could overturn it (though Appius seems to have been very greatly against this right).

In order to achieve his ends of raising an army and putting a limit on the right of appeal, Appius next pushed for the election of a dictator. Though the word has a distinct meaning in our own language today, a dictator in ancient Rome was a very different position that the authoritarians and autocrats that we in the modern world typically associate with the term. Roman dictators in the earlier days of the Republic were individual men elected to wield supreme power which was virtually impossible to veto in order to achieve a specified set of goals. Typically, as in this case, dictators were raised in response to military situations that demanded a single guiding power in Rome that was not subject to the often cumbersome process of checks and balances that defined the Roman governmental system.

Understandably, Appius pushed to have himself appointed as the dictator in order to cement his policies over the Plebians and to further his own political agenda. The Senate, however, apparently realized that the appointment of Appius to the post would have only further polarized the class and political divides within Rome. Instead, it opted to appoint a man named Manius Valerius Maximus, a popular leader in Rome who managed the difficult balancing act of holding both the approval of the people and of the nobles.

Maximus, through his influence with the ordinary citizenry of Rome, was able to calm the dissent among the Plebians and raise a large army to be dispatched under his command against the Sabines. This army scored a major victory, defeating the Sabine foes, while legions commanded by the consuls also went into the field and dispatched two other tribes that had allied with the Sabines against Rome. Upon returning to Rome, the dictator was the hero of the city for his leadership and military successes. However, the problems between the nobles and the Plebians stemming from debt policies were soon to return to the forefront of political discourse. Maximus, as he had promised to the people when raising his army, made the case to the Senate to offer at least some relief on the debt crisis and restrict the measures that creditors could take in punishing those who owed money. The ruling classes, however, refused to take action on the issue. Maximus, establishing a tradition that would later be cemented by the much more famous figure Cincinnatus, returned to private life having acquired a huge amount of support among the Plebians.

After twice having answered Rome's call for troops and twice having been denied action on the issue that was most pressing to them, the Plebians now sought an alternative way to force the leadership of Rome to bend to their will. The answer that was eventually pursued was a proposal made by the Plebian leader Lucius Sicinius Vellutus in either 494 or early 493 BCE. Vellutus, deciding that the Plebians could not achieve the change they sought from within Rome, led a mass

departure of Plebians from the city to the Monte Sacro, a nearby hill that had long been considered sacred because of its role in Roman religious rites. The departure of the Plebians would have had vast economic implications for Rome, as they made up by far the largest part of its labor force and tax base, as well as its military. This, Vellutus correctly reasoned, would finally force action from the Senate and the consuls once the Plebian population of Rome was no longer sustaining the city economically.



*Illustration 2: A 19th century engraving depicting the First Secession of the Plebians*

At this point, the situation could have easily degenerated into a bloody and brutal one with amazing rapidity had the Senate chosen to act rashly or harshly. The Plebians who had left had fortified their

camp to the best of their ability, taking skills learned in the Roman armies and applying them to defend themselves against possible aggression on the part of Rome. The nobles, forced to a point where a final decision with regards to the status of the Plebians would have to be made, decided to relent and to offer some consolations to the commoners. In addition to the debt reliefs that had been so long in coming, however, the Plebians had to be appeased with a set of reforms that would make it more difficult for such tense situations to develop again.

The solution was the addition of a special set of five tribunes, or magistrates of Roman society, to the Roman governmental system. These five tribunes would be drawn exclusively from the Plebian class and would act as a balance to autocratic Patrician policies such as those pushed by Appius. In recognition of his leadership in bringing the Plebians together in protest against the Roman Senate, Vellutus was made one of the first five of these so-called Plebian tribunes. Offices as Aediles, public service officials who saw to the upkeep of civic infrastructure and public events, were also extended to the Plebian class in order to further symbolize their newly increased role in the Roman state. A new assembly, known as the Plebian Assembly, also seems to have come into being at this time, forming a legislative body exclusively held by the commoners that would become quite powerful later in the history of the Republic. For the moment, at least, the struggles between the classes in Rome were calmed to a point that the city could return to a normal state of affairs. However, the same

tensions between the higher and lower orders would continue to manifest themselves throughout the early history of the Roman Republic in a series of loosely related events across multiple centuries that historians have dubbed the Conflict of the Orders.

For the next few decades, Rome seems to have continued to along more or less without incident, probably still fighting minor territorial wars with its neighbors. In 458 BCE, however, Rome would again have to fight a major war with one of its closest neighbors, the Aequi. Though the Aequi were far from a new threat to Rome, the power of the city at this time was somewhat diminished due to a rebellion of slaves that had occurred the previous year, one of several slave revolts that would occur in early Roman history. The damage that had been done by the revolt of slaves, however, was sufficient to strain the resources of Rome in this early period enough to make it vulnerable to outside invasion. The Aequi, seeing their chance to deal a critical blow to an enemy they had been fighting for decades or perhaps even multiple centuries, mustered their forces for another attack on Rome.

At this time, Rome was beginning to expand its territory throughout central Italy, which would be the basis for all of its later conquests. A defeat by the Aequi at this point would have had dire consequences for this program of military expansion and indeed may even have halted Roman territorial gains in the region. In order to deal with the military circumstances at hand, a dictator was once again selected as the supreme military authority of the city. This time, the dictator

would be a man whose devotion to Rome and adherence to his civic duties would make him a model of political virtue throughout both the ancient and modern world: Cincinnatus.



*Illustration 3: Artistic rendering of Cincinnatus being recalled from his farm.*

Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus had already had a speckled career by the time he was chosen as dictator in 458 BCE. As a statesman, Cincinnatus had consistently opposed the increasing power of the Plebian class, making him a polarizing figure in Roman politics. His son,, Caeso Quintus, had apparently shared his father's views on Plebian political roles in the Roman state. Unlike his father, however, Caeso took the matter into his own hands, apparently disrupting meetings of the Plebian tribunes in order to prevent them from taking effective political action. Though there can be little doubt that Caeso's methods would have met with at least some some approval from the

Patrician class (much of which, we can reasonably assume, still held great misgivings about the Plebian tribunes at this time), such actions went against the very core of Roman law. Caeso, in 461 BCE, was sentenced to death for interfering with lawful political activities. Cincinnatus managed to pay a massive penalty levied against his family when Caeso, in order to save his own life, went into exile with Rome's ancient enemy, the Etruscans.

Following the incident of Caeso in 461 BCE, Cincinnatus was still a noble by birth, but forced into a lifestyle that would have been considered unbecoming of a Patrician. Aside from the shame of his son having broken Roman law and fleeing, Cincinnatus had also lost the better part of his fortune paying the financial penalty for Caeso. His funds depleted too much for him to maintain a more noble estate, Cincinnatus and his family were forced to retire to a small farm in order to maintain themselves through agriculture. Though bleak at this point, the career of Cincinnatus was soon to take a major upswing when, in 460 BCE, he was made consul despite his poverty and the embarrassing circumstances surrounding his son's exile.

As a consul, Cincinnatus, though lowered in economic status almost to the level of a Plebian himself, continued to oppose the further integration of Plebians into the political process of Rome. His term would also be the time of another attack from the Volsci, who had not yet given up hope of defeating Rome's armies and stopping the expansion of its political and military power in central Italy. This

threat, however, did not seriously endanger Rome as the war of a mere two years later would.

Cincinnatus was made dictator in response to the besieging of a major Roman army under the command of one of the two consuls for the year of 458 BCE, Lucius Minucius Esquilinus Augurinus. Given command of the armies, Cincinnatus began planning his campaign to defeat the Aequi. His first move was to swell his ranks with a massive levy of troops. Commanding every Roman male citizen of fighting age to present themselves in Mars Field (a large open public area in Rome), Cincinnatus set off with a large enough fighting force to break the siege of Minucius and defeat the attacking Aequi.

Minucius had been besieged on a mountainous hill known as Mons Algidus, to the southeast of Rome (the direction from which the Aequi were making their way toward the city). His siege was the result of a tactic that was common among the Italic tribes, but would have been considered quite unusual elsewhere in the world. The Roman army had made camp, presumably on the slope of Mons Algidus itself. The Aequi, rather than attacking directly, encircled the encamped Romans with a rapidly built defensive walls. The Romans, too, often used this particular battlefield tactic, and would continue to make use of it throughout Roman military history. Indeed, when Cincinnatus arrived at the battlefield, he built yet another wall around the armies of the Aequi, pressing them between two Roman forces (one under Minucius behind their own wall and the one under Cincinnatus now



surrounding them). The plan, though it must have been a difficult one to execute from the perspective of practical battlefield engineering, worked almost flawlessly. The Aequi army, trapped not only by Roman forces but even hindered by the wall they themselves had erected, was forced to surrender shortly after Cincinnatus arrived. The Roman dictator had not only managed to defeat his enemy, but had also saved the Roman force that had originally been trapped by the Aequi. Upon his return to Rome from the Battle of Mons Algidus, Cincinnatus would have been hailed as one of the great military heroes of his time.

When his army returned, Cincinnatus immediately resigned as dictator, since the threat he had been appointed to deal with had been successfully neutralized. The giving up of dictatorial power after such a victory made Cincinnatus famous throughout Rome and established him as an example of Roman civic virtue for leaders to aspire to for the remainder of Rome's history. Cincinnatus would be recalled by the Senate once more, in 439 BCE, to put down a suspected plot to subvert the Senate and establish a new monarchy in Rome. The suspected perpetrator, Spurius Maelius, had garnered favor among the Plebians by providing large amounts of grain at his own expense to them during a massive food shortage that had threatened to starve many of the common people of the city. With this popularity, it was believed, Maelius planned to organize a revolt against the Republic and entrench himself in power as a new king of Rome. Cincinnatus was likely recalled for the mission of arresting the conspirators

because of his universal popularity in Rome from his earlier career. While any other Patrician might have enraged the Plebeians by arresting Maelius, Cincinnatus' reputation was so great that not even the most ardent supporter of Maelius could have accused him of corrupt or personally motivated action.

The first decades of the Roman Republic's existence had seen much change in both political and military fronts. Consistent wars with the Volsci, Sabines and Aequi had contributed to the military prowess of Rome, a feature of the society that would prove invaluable in later eras. Internally, Rome had begun to reform itself away from the oligarchical rule of the Patrician class and into a somewhat more egalitarian model, though class differences still sharply divided the citizenry. These internal reforms, however, would open up the path toward greater political participation from the Plebeians and instill in almost all of Rome's citizens a deep sense of civic pride and duty, another defining characteristic of Roman civilization. This effect was also compounded by the life of Cincinnatus, who from then on would become the standard by which all other statesmen, whether commoner or noble, would be measured. Thus, we can see that the early history of the Republic contributed much not only to the history of Rome but also to the very societal ideas and norms that defined the Roman way of life.

Throughout the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Rome would slowly expand its power throughout central Italy, gradually bringing

the Etruscans, Volsci, Aequi and Sabines, among other peoples of the region, into the Roman sphere of influence. As such, Rome was also becoming the leading member of the Latin League, a body of allied Latin city-states it had long been a member of but with which it would soon come into military conflict. This expansion of Roman influence throughout central Italy was a foreshadowing of the glories of Rome's future. It should, however, be kept in mind that at this time Rome was little more than a semi-hegemonic ruler within the central Italian Peninsula. While the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE had seen some of the changes that would eventually lead Rome to preeminence throughout the known world, it was the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE that would see the projection of Roman power beginning in earnest.

## Section Two

### The Expansion of Roman Power in Italy

As the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE began, Rome was the most powerful it had ever been owing to its more or less stable position of strength within its immediate surroundings. However, a force of massive change that would forever alter the course of Roman history was soon to arrive in Italy and offer the Romans their first taste of battle with a non-Italic foe. This force was an army of Celtic peoples from Gaul, the region that is today central Europe, who were migrating south into new

territories. This army was made up of the Celtic Senone people, who hailed from Transalpine Gaul (the region of Gaul that was separated from the Italian peninsula by the Alps) and was led by their chieftain, a man named Brennus (not to be confused by a later Celtic leader of the same name who led an invasion of Gauls into Greece). These Senones made their way down the eastern Italian coastline from northern Italy, settling into areas that had traditionally been inaccessible to the Celtic peoples because of the physical barrier of the Alps and the prevalence of powerful tribes already living in Italy. As has happened many times throughout history when such a migration of peoples occurs, the Celts would engage in an all-out war with the peoples of Italy for the resource-rich lands that they controlled.

The traditional story which details the beginnings of Rome's involvement in the war with Brennus and his army states that the Romans were approached by the people of Clusium, an Etruscan city in modern Tuscany, for help in fending off the Gauls, who were gradually moving southward along the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea. This story may or may not actually be accurate. While there is every reason to think that the Etruscans and the Romans may have put aside their ancient differences in order to combat a foreign enemy, the Romans would probably not have waited for an appeal of help to engage the advancing Celtic tribe. The history put forward by later Romans further goes on to state that a peace was brokered with Brennus, who agreed to leave Clusium unharmed if the city would surrender some of the territory it controlled to him. The negotiations,

however, fell apart at the last minute, and in the confusion a Celtic noble was killed by a Roman ambassador who had been sent to Clusium as a representative of Rome's commitment to the city. At this point, the question of whether or not Rome defended itself organically against a foreign aggressor or whether the traditional history accurately conveys events becomes one that is purely academic, as the result was a total war between the Senones and Rome.

The war would culminate at the Battle of the Allia, named for a river north of Rome on whose banks the battle would take place. Accounts of the battle vary in terms of which side of the river the Roman army positioned itself. Conventional tactics would seem to dictate that a position on the nearest bank to Rome would have been the more likely disposition, given that it would force the attacking Gauls to ford the river before attacking the Romans, thus tiring them out and breaking up their lines. This disposition is suggested by the Roman historian Titus Livy. The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, on the other hand, posited a disposition on the far side. This would certainly be the less likely of the two scenarios were it not for the fact that both versions state that the Roman soldiers, once their lines had been broken, attempted to ford a river and many drowned due to the weight of their armor. In the case of Livy, the fording takes place in the Tiber, which adjoined the Allia nearby. However, since it would be more likely that the Roman army, outnumbering the Celts as it most likely did, would have pursued an organized retreat back toward Rome, the account of Diodorus Siculus is probably the more accurate on this

point.

Whatever the disposition, the Battle of the Allia was a military disaster for the Romans, who according to both accounts did not hold their lines against the Senone attackers. Brennus, though outnumbered by perhaps as much as two to one, achieved a victory by exploiting the gap in the Roman line when the line broke, possibly because the Romans had not established defensive works before the battle began. With the Battle of the Allia, which took place only about ten miles north of Rome, concluded in a decisive Celtic victory, Brennus and his forces now had a clear road before them leading to the city of Rome itself.

Rome, already rich in resources for a city in its immediate area, was a target for the Senones that could not possibly have been resisted, especially since the Celts would have perceived little threat from the Roman military after its poor showing at the Allia. Brennus led his army south and undertook a historic venture: the first sacking of the city of Rome. The Senones probably arrived outside of Rome on the same day that the Battle of the Allia had taken place, but camped outside its limits until the next day when a full assault could be launched with rested troops and with the advantage of daylight. The delay bought the Romans time to entrench themselves in the city's citadel, which would greatly have impeded the ability of Brennus' army to take the entire city.

Nevertheless, if anything of the accounts gathered by Titus Livy regarding the sacking of Rome in 390 BCE is correct, the Senone attack was devastating despite the Roman defensive preparations. Brennus and his army moved into the city the day after the Battle of the Allia, making Rome's defeat at the hands of the Senones complete. According to Livy, many of the city's elder statesmen remained in their homes and were killed by Brennus' soldiers, though this is very likely an apocryphal story meant to convey to later Roman readers the perceived dignity and honor of the leaders of Rome during its early Republican period. The citadel, however, maintained its defensive integrity, denying the Gallic tribe the ability to defeat Rome's defenders directly. However, the Roman soldiers still behind the defenses would soon run out of provisions, making even their position within the citadel untenable.

Luckily for Rome, Brennus was apparently open to negotiations on the subject of peace. Although he had all but conquered Rome, the Senone leader would have been in a difficult position militarily. Holding the city, especially with its large non-Celtic population, would have required almost all of his resources and made it virtually impossible for him to fight any other regional powers and maintain his hold on Rome at the same time. Instead, Brennus accepted a payment of half a ton of Roman gold to effectively buy him out of the city. The Romans, beaten and disgraced by an enemy from a region of Europe that would one day be a part of their own empire, accepted the terms and paid Brennus and his army the city's ransom.

Rome, still in the very early stages of its development into a major power of the ancient world, had tasted serious defeat for the first time. Although the sacking would have been a major setback for the growing city, it was almost certainly far less damaging than the more famous sacking by Aleric and the Visigoths at the end of the imperial period. If the accounts of later historians are accurate, it would seem that Roman power in central Italy did not significantly diminish after the Battle of the Allia and the first sack of the city, indicating that at least the necessary infrastructure, military and population of Rome were probably not excessively affected by the defeat.

In some sense, however, the sack may have been beneficial for Rome in the long run. Having seen the use of military power by Brennus to achieve victory and profit far from his homeland, the Romans may now have understood the potential of an imperial policy. Within only a few decades, the Romans would have their chance to grow from only a regional power of central Italy into the dominating force on the peninsula, a position from which they would gradually build their now famous empire. The beginning of this expansion of Roman power would come in the form of a series of three wars, collectively known as the Samnite Wars.





*Illustration 4: Samnite soldiers depicted in tomb art. Note the heavy armor, shield and long spear, which were typical armaments of Mediterranean warfare during this period.*

The Samnites were a people of southern Italy who had tacitly aligned themselves with Rome during Brennus' invasion. Much like the Latin League, the Samnites were actually a confederation of various groups and cities that all shared a common language, culture and background. As such, they were quite militarily powerful, being able to raise armies from more than a single urban area. The events surrounding the outbreak of the First Samnite War may or may not be apocryphal as reported in later Roman histories. If accurate, however, they nicely illustrate the state of Italy at the time as a patchwork quilt of different peoples eager to ally with or against each other as was most convenient at the time. In truth, this state of affairs mimics quite closely the state Italy would again find itself in after the fall of the Roman Empire and the onset of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, when city-states would routinely pursue similar diplomatic ties for military benefit.

The First Samnite War apparently occurred because of a Samnite attack on a people near to them known as the Campanians. The Campanians had themselves been drawn into a war with the Samnites because of an initial Samnite attack on a Campanian ally known as the Sidicini, an enigmatic people whose territories and culture are poorly documented. In 343 BCE, the Campanians appealed to Rome for help in battling the powerful Samnites, offering both financial compensation and their own aid in helping the Romans to defeat their enemies in the future. Rome, however, was already bound by a treaty with the Samnites. Owing to the lack of contemporary historical records, little can definitively be said about the content and terms of this treaty, other than that it would have precluded Rome from directly attacking the Samnites on behalf of the Campanians. However, a clever way around this was devised by the Campanian ambassadors that had been sent to appeal to the Senate for Roman aid. Though the treaty would not allow the Romans and Samnites to engage in a proxy war against each other through Campania, it apparently did include a formal declaration of peace between the Romans and the Samnites in their own territories. If Campania were no longer free but instead fell under Roman authority, therefore, the Samnites would have to violate the treaty in order to attack it. Realizing this and deciding that surrendering to Rome without the devastating effects of a war was better than suffering the economic, agricultural and military hardships of a war with the Samnites, the Campanians allegedly turned political control of their entire territory

over to Rome.

The Samnites, however, were not to be deterred by such a simple tactic. As soon as the declaration had been made that Campania was no longer free but a client state of Rome, the Samnites decided to attack, violating the treaty they had had with Rome up to that point. By the laws of diplomacy, the breaking of the treaty on the part of the Samnites released the Romans from any consideration of its terms, and thus began the First Samnite War. The Roman response, if portrayed accurately by later writers, was a strategically sound two-prong military operation. As two objectives existed, two armies were dispatched to more effectively achieve them.. The first objective, that of defending Campania, was to be achieved by sending a Roman army into the territory itself to do battle with the Samnite forces that were already moving toward Campania. Next, another force was dispatched directly into Samnite territory to threaten the enemy in their own homeland and to make it difficult for the Samnites to send additional troops into Campania. The strategy was a sound one that would force the Samnites to fight on two fronts while having to allocate most of their resources to Campania in order to have any hope of successfully occupying it.

The first battle of the war was fought between the Samnite forces that had entered Campania and the Roman army sent to defend the territory, commanded by the consul Marcus Valerius Corvus. The battle took place near Mount Gaurus, today better known as Mount

Barbaro, a volcanic mountain near the coast in Campania. The tactics employed in the Battle of Mount Gaurus are not well recorded, other than an account by Titus Livy regarding one major cavalry charge and two infantry assaults against the Samnite lines by the Romans. What Livy does convey quite clearly is that the Samnites had managed to construct a defensive line capable of withstanding a nearly all-day battle with the Roman army, a feat in its own right. At the end of the day, however, the Samnites finally broke ranks and retreated from the battlefield, having sustained heavy losses through the long battle. The Romans, though certainly encountering heavy casualties of their own, remained in command of the field and thus emerged victorious from the battle, eliminating the immediate threat to Campania.

The next battle of the war would occur in Samnite territory, near the ancient town of Saticula. The other army that had marched from Rome at the same time as that commanded by Marcus Valerius Corvus had pushed south into Samnium (the land held by the Samnites) in order to defeat Rome's new enemy in their own homeland. This army, commanded by Corvus' consular colleague Aulus Cornelius Cossus, had camped briefly at the city of Saticula before moving out to engage with the Samnites directly. Though the consul had very much intended to do battle with the Samnites in territory better known to them than to himself (we may infer this much from historical context, as no other conclusion follows from his decision to engage them in their own lands), he did not reckon on the ambush that was soon to fall upon the army he had brought with him from Rome.

As was often a military necessity when moving armies throughout Italy, Cossus marched his army through a pass between two mountains to push deeper into Samnite territory. Unfortunately for him, such passes made for excellent choke points at which to waylay invading armies. The Samnites, knowing the path Cossus would have to take through the mountains, positioned themselves above the pass at a narrow point and attacked the Roman force, leaving it in a desperate defensive position. Luckily for the Romans, however, there was a higher position still, a small hill overlooking the Samnite position, that their enemies had failed to occupy for reasons unknown. This gave the Roman army an opportunity to distract the Samnites and reposition themselves more advantageously. A military tribune under the command of Cossus took a portion of the Roman army to occupy the hill, diverting the attention of the Samnites from the main Roman force to the suddenly occupied high ground above them. Cossus took the limited window of time this gave him to withdraw the bulk of the Roman army away from the part of the pass the Samnites had occupied, saving the larger portion of his army from the effects of the ambush. The force that had taken the hill, however, was now almost entirely surrounded by its enemies.

That night, the small Roman force on the hill managed to sneak past the Samnite position, probably gaining critical intelligence on the disposition of the Samnite army as it did so. The next morning, with the smaller force returned to it, the Roman army attacked the

Samnites and dispatched their entire army with what was apparently relative ease and rapidity. With the pass now clear and a large Samnite force defeated, the Romans gained easier access to the remainder of Samnium. The Samnites, having suffered two defeats, were now in need of a victory over the Romans.

The third great Battle of the First Samnite War would be fought once again by Marcus Valerius Corvus in Campania. The Samnites apparently decided to carry the war into Campania, rather than continuing to fight in their own lands. While this may seem like an unusual decision given their defeat at the hands of Cossus, the move may have been made to keep Samnium from being ravaged by battle. Massing a new army, the Samnites occupied the Campanian town of Suessula, from which they intended to strike deeper into the region. Corvus, however, learned of the Samnite position and began moving his army toward Suessula to head the Samnites off. What happened next is, with very little doubt, an apocryphal retelling of the battle.

The Samnite army, according to Livy's history, was apparently extremely low on resources when it reached Suessula. In order to sustain themselves, the Samnites were forced to forage the surrounding areas for food. This in and of itself is in no way unusual, given that both ancient and relatively modern armies have often had to resort to foraging to supplement their food reserves in the field. What makes Livy's account dubious to modern military historians is the fact that the Samnites are said to have begun this foraging with a

large portion of their forces after the Roman forces arrived at Suessula. Under almost no circumstances would any kind of experienced commander have devoted any significant portion of his troops to foraging with the enemy encamped close by. Livy's account of the Romans easily defeating a Samnite force that was severely disorganized and depleted because large foraging parties had been taken from its ranks is therefore judged by many modern historians to either be a great exaggeration of real events or an entirely inaccurate account.

Whether or not the battle near Suessula was portrayed accurately in Livy's account, the First Samnite War ended in a victory for Rome. Though the Samnites would remain a fairly large regional power in Italy until the Second Samnite War, their power relative to an ascending Rome was established with the first war. Rome, victorious against the Samnites, was now the most powerful and influential state in most of south and central Italy. Now, however, Rome would face a new challenge from within its own sphere of influence.

Beginning in or about 340 BCE, not long after the conclusion of the First Samnite War, stirrings of revolution began to occur in the states that made up the Latin League. Such resentment and fear of Rome's growing power among the Latin states is understandable in the context of ancient power balances, as Rome had taken on a nearly hegemonic leading role not entirely unlike the better-known contemporary analog of Sparta in the Greek Peloponnesian League.

The rebellion that the Latin states would start, however, would forever change the power structure of Italy, making Rome its undisputed superpower. The ensuing war, known simply as the Second Latin War, would also end the Latin League as a political coalition, bringing about the destruction of an institution that was probably almost as old as Rome itself.

Intriguingly, the Second Latin War would start when the Latin city-states decided that they wished to attack the Samnites on behalf of the Sidicini, who the Samnites had once again initiated a war with. Rome, rather unusually, defended the Samnites and refused to start another war with them, ostensibly because after the First Samnite War the peace treaty between Rome and the Samnites had entered back into force. As leaders of the Latin League, the Romans also attempted to forbid any of the other Latin states from attacking the Samnites. This stirred great resentment among the other states of the league, as Rome had no formal authority over their political and military activities outside of matters pertaining to internal Latin League policy.

The non-Roman Latins, fearing for their own continued autonomy, allied with several other groups in the area, including the Campanians and the Volsci, the latter of which was one of their oldest common enemies with Rome. Moving into Campania and Samnium much as the Romans themselves had done only a few years earlier, the Latins directly violated the commands of Rome and in so doing found themselves at war with both Rome and the Samnites at the same time.



The Latin War itself is not well documented, but at least some major points of its history have been recorded. In its first year, 340 BCE, a major battle apparently took place between the Romans and an alliance of Campanians and Latins on the slopes of the dormant volcano Mount Vesuvius. The Romans, commanding an army hardened from the recent First Samnite War, defeated the Latin coalition army. This battle would set the tone for the remainder of the war, which seems to have been a string of Roman victories over the forces of the Latin states, which simply were not up to the task of beating an experienced Roman army in the field.

In 339 BCE, the Romans and Latins met once more at the Battle of Trifanum. Manlius Imperiosus, the Roman commander who had already defeated the Latins on the slopes of Vesuvius, met with the Latin armies near the Campanian town of Trifanum. Once again, the Romans were victorious, pushing the Latin forces allied against them out of Campania and back to Latium, where they would continue to resist the Roman army on their own ground. By this point in the campaign, it would have been clear that the Latins were not going to achieve a military victory over Rome. However, the Latin War was not yet over, as the Romans decided now to fully subjugate the Latins. Moving into Latium, the Roman forces began to systematically attack all of the Latin city-states, bringing them one by one under Roman rule.

Following the conquests of the Latin cities in 339 and 338 BCE,

Rome gained complete political dominance over Latium, vastly expanding its political power and territory. This was an important step for the Romans on their path toward gaining rule over all of Italy and, eventually, over the vast majority of Europe and the Mediterranean. The Latin states not only added to the economically productive land controlled by Rome, but also gave it a new source of troops for future wars. At first, Latium would retain a somewhat unique identity, but over time the Latins from other city-states would become almost completely indistinguishable from Rome itself in culture and customs. Rome had started its first large-scale military colonization, and would soon have the opportunity to put that practice into effect in other parts of Italy as its power grew greater and greater.

The next phase of Roman expansion in Italy would begin in or about 327 BCE, when the Second Samnite War began. The Samnites, though not as powerful as the Romans, were still the other great political and military power in Italy at the time, making it more or less inevitable that they would eventually come into another conflict with Rome as it continued through its early expansionist phase. During the years following the Latin War, Roman power had reached out into new areas, growing closer and closer to Samnium. Campania, in particular, was essentially annexed into the Roman sphere of influence, a major concern for the nearby Samnites. The final straw in this policy of Roman expansion southward toward Samnium was the establishment of a Roman colony centered at the border town of Fregellae, which had been targeted by the Samnites during earlier wars. This colony,

established sometime between 330 and 328 BCE, represented a Roman presence so near to Samnium that it could not reasonably be ignored. At the time, the Samnites were engaged elsewhere in fighting off the forces of a Greek city-state that had inserted itself into southern Italy and begun to meddle with military affairs concerning some of the city-states thereof. When the Greeks had been defeated, however, it would have become clear that Rome was the most immediate threat to Samnite territorial interests.

The Second Samnite War would not actually break out until 326 BCE, when the Romans took Neapolis (modern Naples) from the Samnites. Even then, Neapolis was a major power center in the region, and the direct removal of Samnite forces from it in favor of Roman authority, allegedly at the request of the city's leaders, made for a certain war between the two great powers of Italy. Beginning with the taking of Neapolis, each of the two principle states began to forge alliances against the other, turning what could have been a limited war like the First Samnite War into a general conflict involving much of southern and central Italy. In the endeavor of securing allies against the Samnites, Rome proved more successful than its opponents, bringing not only allies from its own sphere of influence, but also peoples from even farther south in Italy than the Samnites into the war, pressing their enemies from both sides.

As with other great military undertakings in Roman history, the Second Samnite War warranted the appointment of a dictator to

govern all military matters. As was custom, a notable statesman and military adept was chosen, this time in the person of a man named Lucius Papirius Cursor. With the help of other military leaders, including the consuls, this dictator initially inflicted great damage on Samnium. After the campaign seasons of 325 and 324 BCE, having suffered heavy losses at the hands of the Romans, the Samnites agreed to negotiate for peace, probably realizing that they could not sustain such a large-scale war for very long. Though this might have ended the war, the Samnites decided against peace, presumably either because of ongoing Roman military activity in their territories, unacceptably harsh peace terms from Rome or some combination of the two.

Across the years of 323 and 322 BCE, the Samnites continued to lose ground to the Roman army, which was now practically assured of victory. Rome, having gained many allies and much military experience from its recent wars, was poised to become the one and only leading military power in most of Italy with the defeat of the Samnites. The Samnites, however, would try one last great attempt to bring the Roman army to heel in the field. The Samnite commander at this time, a man named Gaius Pontius, would achieve a serious victory over the Roman army at the Battle of the Caudine Forks by means of expertly applied counterintelligence and excellent tactical thought.

Pontius decided that the best way to defeat the Roman army was not in the open field, but rather by laying a trap for it and taking it by

surprise on ground where he and his army would hold the advantage. To this end, he selected a natural feature known as the Caudine Forks, a narrow mountain passage that would be ideal for an ambush. Now, however, he had to force the Roman army into this disadvantageous strip of land. To this end, Livy reports he sent out small numbers of his troops disguised as local herdsmen in the vicinity of the Roman camp. Since the Romans were far from home and stretched thin in their supply lines, standard military practice dictated that Roman foraging parties would not be difficult to find. When the disguised Samnite soldiers were able to encounter these parties sent by the Romans to find food, they would inform the Roman soldiers that the Samnite forces were far to the south attacking Luceria, one of the southern cities that had allied with Rome. By planting this seed in the minds of the Roman commanders through this truly brilliant application of counterintelligence, Pontius ensured that the Roman army would have to move south by the quickest possible route: directly through the Caudine Forks.

Livy here describes the ground on which the Battle of the Caudine Forks took place in excellent military detail. The path through the Caudine Forks passed first through one narrow chokepoint bordered by cliffs and steep, heavily wooded hills before widening out into a grassy plain. On the other side of this plain was a second pass, narrower even than the first. From the plain, no path existed except to one of these two passes. The Roman army, therefore, was allowed by the Samnites to pass without incident through the first pass and

into the plain. Since the Romans believed the Samnite force to be waiting for them at Luceria, they probably entered the pass with a false sense of safety, believing that, despite the dangers of the ground, there would be no force there to exploit them. When the Roman army reached the narrower pass on the other side of the plain, however, they found it blocked by a large barricade that the Samnites had erected by cutting down large trees and piling them across the path along with large rocks and boulders that had been pressed against the tree trunks to keep the Romans from removing them. As soon as the Roman army had reached that pass, it was well and truly inside the Samnite trap.



*Illustration 5: A rare (though badly damaged) fresco depicting the Battle of the Caudine Forks*

The Romans, realizing the trap they had been led into, moved backwards through the plain and back to the first pass. However, the Samnites had erected a similar barricade there while the Roman army had moved forward through the plain to encounter the first one. Now

trapped in the valley between the two barricaded choke points, the Romans entrenched themselves against the Samnite army that they were now aware commanded the high ground above them. The Samnites, however, did not attack. A probably apocryphal tale is relayed by Livy about the Samnites seeking advice from a retired commander named Herennius, who first suggested that the Roman force be allowed to depart and, upon hearing many objections from the other Samnites, suggested the alternative course of killing them all. Though this story is probably not historically accurate, it is likely a literary device used by Livy to illustrate the strategic considerations of the matter. If Pontius allowed the Romans to live and leave peacefully, he could sue for peace, and this is the course he ultimately pursued.

The Romans, having concluded a tacit treaty, were allowed to leave without their weapons and, if Livy states correctly, wearing only one piece of clothing each and being made to pass under a yoke on the way out of the pass. This humiliation of their enemies would have been unusual if the Samnites intended to make peace, but the disarming would have been absolutely necessary and so may be safely taken to be historically accurate. Though the Samnites had probably gained some degree of good will from Rome by sparing its army at the battle, the Second Samnite War would not come to an end. A brief truce, however, may have occurred while the Romans considered whether or not to accept the Samnite offer of a formal peace.

From 320 until 312 BCE, the war raged on, with Samnite cities being captured or destroyed while the Samnites fought the Romans in the far south of Italy to keep them from gaining too much of a foothold on that front. Though the Caudine Forks had offered a great victory, it was too little too late for the Samnites, who were rapidly losing their grip on power in southern Italy to growing Roman influence.

Beginning in 312, however, Rome would gain a new enemy that, by common enmity with Rome, would fall loosely on the side of the Samnites in the war. This enemy was once again the Etruscans, who probably decided to engage the Romans because of their new long-standing military commitments against the Samnites. If ever the Etruscans were to gain their victory over Rome, this was probably their last real chance.

In 310 and again 309 BCE, the combined Etruscan city-states engaged the Roman armies and attempted to exploit the thin spreading of Rome's military across south and central Italy in order to gain a victory against their ancient enemy. By this time, however, the Etruscans were simply not up to the task of defeating a Roman army, a circumstance that is probably at least partially due to the battle-hardened state of the Roman soldiers after years of war with the Samnites. The Roman military had, by this time, become the greatest power of ancient Italy, a fact that would play into Roman military traditions as the influence of Rome spread far and wide in the coming centuries.



The effective ending of the Second Samnite War would come with a Roman victory in 306 BCE which crippled the fighting capabilities of the Samnites. A joint force of Samnites and Hercini, an Italic people from Latium who had combined with the Volsci against Rome in the earlier days of the Republic, was defeated systematically by armies commanded by both consuls of that year, Quintus Marcius Tremulus and Publius Cornelius Arvina. In 305 BCE, a renewed Roman invasion of Samnium was undertaken. During this invasion, a final Samnite force attempted to attack the Roman army in defense of their own homeland, but seem to have been dispatched with relative ease. By this time, the wars had taken their toll on Samnium. Having lost huge numbers of its troops and dedicated many of its economic resources to the war with Rome to absolutely no gain in either territory or political power, the Samnites were ultimately forced to recognize that they had been beaten. In 304 BCE, peace was finally made between Rome and Samnium. Though parts of Samnium remained free, much of the territory it had formerly held had been taken on by Rome as part of its growing colonial system. The Second Samnite War had made Rome the master of its immediate surroundings, taking it from the hegemonic ruler of central Italy to effectively controlling most of central and south Italy directly, though several areas were still only proxy states.

Interestingly, both the Samnites and the Etruscans, the two primary enemies of Rome, would finally fall to it in at almost exactly the same time, during the events surrounding the Third Samnite War. Beginning

in 299 BCE, the Etruscans seem to have started planning a last campaign against Rome. For this war, they attempted to hire mercenaries from among the Gauls now living in Italy to pad their ranks and give them a chance of defeating the militarily more powerful Romans. The Gauls, however, would not agree to fight Rome in the field, probably being well aware of the ever-increasing military power that Rome possessed. The Etruscans, left to their own devices, found themselves horribly outmatched in the war. Ancient accounts suggest that Etruscan armies did not even take the field against the Romans, preferring instead to defend their cities while Roman armies destroyed their outlying areas. Though this may well represent the general tactic employed throughout the war, there probably would have come at least some points of direct conflict, as the Etruscans would not have been able to sustain the attacks on their agriculturally productive lands indefinitely.

The Etruscan campaign of 299 BCE went easily for Rome, which had so established its regional preeminence that even the Etruscans no longer posed a serious threat. The Etruscan incident, however, was only the beginning of the war. While Rome was occupied in the lands of their erstwhile Etruscan enemies, the Samnites took the opportunity to once again prepare for a war with Rome. The Etruscan theater of the war would likely have taken some pressure and scrutiny off of the Samnites, allowing them to begin to marshal their forces for one more attempt to throw off the hegemonic power of Rome. Their need for allies in the war, however, would be their undoing. Because the

Samnites were aware that they could not best Rome in the field alone, they were forced to turn to other peoples of southern Italy for aid. Unfortunately for the Samnites, the will to oppose Rome militarily was not widespread, especially given the city-state's recent victory in the Second Samnite War. When the Samnites began seeking out alliances, some of the peoples that they initially thought would join with them against Rome instead informed the Romans of the Samnite plans. With this, the stage was set for the Third Samnite War.

Allegedly, the war did not begin immediately after the Romans learned of the Samnite intention to make war on them again. Instead, the Romans seem to have pursued a plan of allying with the very states that the Samnites had hoped to bring into the war on their side. This plan stood at least some chance of preventing the war, as a lack of allies against the more powerful Rome could have caused the Samnites to rethink the renewal of aggression. This policy was principally employed in the case of the Lucanians, a people of Italy's far south who had been courted by the Samnites. The Lucanians, not wanting to join a fight against Rome but also under the threat of Samnite retribution for their refusal to do so, were forced to seek a direct alliance with Rome in order to dissuade the Samnites from attacking them. Rome accepted the offer to ally with the Lucanians and sent representatives to Lucania to inform the Samnites already stationed there of the arrangement. At this juncture, the Samnites allegedly threatened the Roman representatives, an act strictly forbidden by the ancient diplomatic customs of Italy. For this offense

and for their refusal to remove their forces from Lucania, Rome once again declared war on their foremost regional enemy.

The ensuing war was a difficult one even for Rome, because military operations against the Etruscan city-states were still being carried out even as the new Samnite war was being initiated. Thus, Rome was forced to fight what effectively amounted to two wars simultaneously. In later periods, when Rome commanded its massive military force that could fight in multiple locations on opposite sides of the Mediterranean without any difficulty, this would have posed no problem. At this early stage of Rome's history, however, balancing the two wars and the troops and resources needed for them would have been a great undertaking for the Romans.

To the end of achieving this, a fairly self-explanatory tactic of dividing up Roman field forces under the two consuls for the year of 298 BCE, when the war actually began in earnest, was pursued. These two consuls were Gnaeus Fulvius Maximus Centumalus and Lucius Cornelius Scipio Barbatus. Conflicting evidence, however, exists as to which consul went into the Etruscan lands and which led the Roman armies back into Samnium. Livy's history states that it was Barbatus who led the Etruscan campaign and Centumalus who attacked Samnium. However, an inscription found on the sarcophagus of Lucius Cornelius Scipio Barbatus when his family's tomb was rediscovered (itself an important find with regards to this era of Roman history) suggests that he was the one who reentered Samnium. Regardless of

who led which campaign, we may say with some certainty that at any one time during this war one consul would have been dedicated to each of its two major theaters.

Through the course of the Third Samnite War, which would last from 298 to 293 BCE, the Samnites would consistently attempt to make use of the division of Roman forces. Indeed, at one point, Livy states that a Samnite commander was dispatched to provide aid and organizational assistance to the Etruscans. This Samnite leader, Gellius Egnatius by name, was at least partially foiled by the arrival of a Roman force of some 12,000 soldiers close to his camp. Though no singular great battle ensued, the threat of force from Rome was enough to keep some of the Etruscan cities that had not joined the war up to that point from lending their forces to Egnatius. However, the culmination of this effort on the part of the Samnites to take advantage of the war the Etruscans were waging against Rome would be a joint effort between the two powers to crush the Roman legions once and for all.

After three years of fighting many smaller engagements throughout both Etruria and Samnium, the Romans would at last be met with a combined force of Samnites, Etruscans and their various allies at one of the greatest battles of ancient Italy: the Battle of Sentinum. Rome, now hardened by decades upon decades of war, would face all of its principal enemies of the time at once in open combat in the field, testing once and for all whether or not it would be the dominating power of Italy going forward. Though little-known today, this battle

would be another of the critical steps on Rome's path to growing from a small central Italian city-state into the master of the Mediterranean.

In 296 BCE, Rome's consuls were two men named Lucius Volumnius Flamma Violens and Appius Claudius Caecus. By this time, the two-front war Rome had been fighting for multiple years had begun to take its toll. Though the Roman military had certainly been the victor up to this point, keeping armies in the field in both regions had been difficult, especially since an increase in pressure from one front would usually cause Roman armies to be diverted from the other, typically causing in turn an increase in pressure from the now less-defended front. This back and forth exchange of blows from both directions had kept Rome at bay, but had not produced any decisive victories for either the Samnites or the Etruscans. To win against Rome, it now appeared, the two would have to meet their common enemy in a single battle.

By the time of the consular rotation for the year of 295 BCE, the mechanics of the Samnite-led alliance were already well under way. Knowing that an escalation of hostilities was coming, the Romans recalled two previous consuls, Quintus Flavius Maximus Rullianus and Publius Decius Mus, both distinguished military leaders who had fought very effectively against both Samnite and Etruscan forces in the past. At first, these two commanders vigorously attacked the enemy Etruscan states, probably trying to bring an end to the Etruscan theater of the war in order to pursue a complete attack by the Roman

armies on Samnium afterward. However, the Samnite, Umbrian and Senone forces were already mobilizing, and the Battle of Sentinum was now not far off.

Unfortunately for the Samnite alliance, the plan to bring all forces to bear at once fell apart just as it was about to come to fruition. The Romans, learning of the armies massing against them, launched a diversionary attack against Etruscan lands, forcing the Etruscans and the possibly the Umbrians to reroute their armies for defensive operations. With this, the field was leveled considerably, as the enemy forces had previously outnumbered the Romans by a very large margin. Whether or not Umbrian forces were present at the battle is somewhat debatable. Livy states that they were not, but notes that other sources claimed that they were. Furthermore, Sentinum was a city that was actually located in the region of Umbria, making it likely that the Umbrians were at least somewhat represented there.

Whatever the case as to the Umbrian presence, we may say with certainty that the Roman legions numbering some 40,000 men under both consuls at the time met a combined force of Samnites and Senones that may still have numbered as many as 80,000 men (though it is very likely that this number was exaggerated by later historians). Commanding this large force that had combined against Rome was Gallius Egnatius, the Samnite commander who had rallied anti-Roman forces among the Etruscans earlier in the war. At first, both forces held off on attacking, each probably hoping to find a way to gain an

additional tactical advantage over the other to mitigate the heavy losses that such a large battle would inevitably bring. After two days of occupying the field without fighting, however, the Romans began the battle.

The lines of battle at the Battle of Sentinum were drawn so that the Samnites faced off against Quintus Fabius Maximus Rullianus on the Roman right flank, while Publius Decius Mus commanded the left flank, across the field from which the Senones were massed. Interestingly enough, two different battlefield strategies were employed across these two flanks of the Roman army. On the right, Maximus Rullianus pursued a more conservative strategy, leaving himself in a defensive position against which the Samnites would have to launch attacks. On the left, however, Publius Decius Mus seems to have pursued a much more aggressive plan of battle, launching direct attacks against the Senone line with his troops. There are several possible reasons for this discrepancy in tactics. The first possibility is that it was planned out in advance and based on an assumption that the Senones would break more easily than the Samnites, as long as the Samnites were pinned down on the right and unable to divert troops. Another possibility is that the two plans were hit upon in battle in response to real-time conditions on the battlefield, such as the existence of weaknesses in the Senone portion of the line that could be readily pressed on the left. It is also possible that this disparity between the flanks simply represented each commander fighting in the manner to which he was most accustomed, though this would



seem unusual given the emphasis typically put on battlefield organization by the Roman military.

The implementation of these two different strategies on the Roman right and left resulted in two very different outcomes on the flanks. On the right, the more cautious defensive strategy produced excellent results, with the Samnites taking casualties with every charge and the Roman infantry more or less waiting until their opponents had been tired out by repeated charges to make their own move. On the left, however, the situation was not so advantageous. The multiple charges led by Publius Decius Mus, while effective at first, also left his own troops open to a counterattack. This counterattack, which took the form of a cavalry charge from the Senone line, would ultimately leave the Romans in a precarious position. With a gap opened up in his line, Publius Decius Mus is recorded to have followed a bizarre military custom of ancient Rome, that of *Devotio* (the Latin root of the modern English word “devotion”). *Devotio* was a religious ritual performed on the battlefield in which a commander who wished to achieve victory would offer himself as a ritual sacrifice to the gods via a suicide charge into the enemy line. This was the course of action taken by Publius Decius Mus, who would thereafter become the most famous historical example of *Devotio*.

According to Livy, the *Devotio* was a success, as the tide on the Roman left soon turned in favor of the Romans once more (though of course Livy superstitiously attributed the reversal to the *Devotio* itself).

At about the same time, the right flank began to swing wide to cut off the extreme end of the Samnite line and began to roll the flank up toward the center. With both wings of their army pressed simultaneously, the Senones and Samnites were suddenly caught in between two Roman assaults. As Quintus Fabius Maximus probably planned, the flanks, once pushed into a retreat, fell back upon their own forces, leading to disorganization among the opposing force.

At this point, an unusual detail comes up in the account regarding the last effort of the Senones to maintain the battle and defeat the Romans. Left in a highly disorganized and disarrayed states with the Samnite line rapidly collapsing, the Senones apparently formed into what is known as the *testudo* (literally meaning tortoise) formation by encircling their own formation's top and sides with their shields and attacking from this strong wall of defense with spears. This tactic is well-known to have been used by the Romans themselves, and there is no reason to think that it would not have existed among the other Italic tribes as well. The Senones, however, were Gauls, of Celtic rather than Italic origin. This being the case, the use of the *testudo* seems somewhat out of place, as the Celtic tribes typically used smaller shields, less armor and shorter spears than the Romans. This account may simply be a description of a similar but distinct tactic written from a later Roman perspective. If it is accurate, however, it reveals a great deal about the amount of cultural interchange that occurred between the Senones and the native Italic peoples after the Gauls settled in Italy.

The Senone attempt to hold a defensive formation, however, failed, leaving the advancing Roman line in a position to sweep its enemies. Though the Romans had had some difficulty in the early part of the battle when their left flank had been hit by the Senones counterattack, the legions of Rome had ultimately prevailed against the greatest combined force in Italy. The battle, though it could have ended in a disaster for Rome had the Etruscans and the full forces of the Umbrians arrived or had the Senones broken through the Roman left, was instead one of the greatest victories in Rome's early history. Sentinum, more than any other battle, established that Rome was to be the greatest power in Italy and that no other power could now stand in its way.

The Third Samnite War continued on until at least 290 BCE (though it is possible that hostilities lasted a few years beyond this) without another high point such as Sentinum being reached. The Samnites, now, were hanging on in a war that was an exercise in futility. Deprived of Etruscan help and without enough allies to mount another serious attack against the massed Roman armies, the Samnites now fought mostly to retain what territory they had left. Throughout the 280s BCE, it is probable that Rome continued its expansionist policies, especially in the light of the fact that no cohesive force could now stand in its way. In 282 BCE, another decisive battle took place that would solidify the nature of the relationship between the Romans and the Etruscans in Italy. This battle, known as the Battle of Populonia,

has survived only in name and no tactical or strategic details about it are known from ancient sources. What is known, however, is that Populonia signaled the final defeat of the Etruscans and their complete incorporation into the Roman sphere of influence.

By the end of the 280s BCE, Rome's role in Italy had completely transformed from simply the dominant force among the peoples and city-states to their effective ruler. Most of central and southern Italy were now under Roman control, some areas as colonies and some retaining more autonomy as Roman allies. The evolution of Rome from its early beginnings to its establishment of widespread rule over the Mediterranean was now well under way. In order to reach the heights that it would one day achieve, however, another element was needed. Rome had now expanded itself to ruling much of Italy. Now, it would have to project its power beyond the boundaries of the Italian peninsula and into the areas that lay beyond.

## Section Three

# Expansion Into the Broader Mediterranean

After the consolidation of power throughout most of the southern

half of Italy in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, Rome would soon gain its chance to expand its power base farther out into the Mediterranean. The first phase of the expansion that would eventually make Rome the master of the known world was an event commonly known as the Pyrrhic War, which began in 280 BCE. At this time, despite the fact that Rome had taken over much of southern Italy, another regional power, the city-states of ancient Greece, still held some colonies in the extreme south of the peninsula. These colonies were, in many cases, quite ancient, often going back to the time in which Rome would have been a fairly minor city-state during its own early monarchical period. With Rome now expanding, however, these colonies were among the territories that would have inevitably come into conflict with it at some point.

### *The Pyrrhic War*

The trigger for the Pyrrhic War would be a dispute over an existing naval treaty between Rome and the Greek colony city of Terentum (modern Taranto). The city, though a colony, was a massive population center and trading hub in its own right, making it one of the greater powers in its localized part of the Mediterranean. Terentum had already had several dealings with Rome, as the victory in the Third Samnite War had allowed the Romans to expand their influence into the southern parts of Italy, putting Roman political and military might practically on the doorsteps of the Greek colonies. Tarentum, however, was sufficiently large, rich and powerful that

Rome had left it more or less to its own devices while the wars with the Samnites had gone on. Even after the ending of that conflict, Tarentum had continued to function without Roman interference. That would begin to change, however, beginning in the 280s BCE. At this time, it was becoming clear that Rome and Tarentum, being the two largest military powers in all of Italy, would have to find a way to pursue their relations practically. As a part of this, the cities struck on an agreement that Roman naval fleets would not enter the waters claimed by Tarentum, as the Greek colony possessed what was probably the largest naval fleet in Italy at the time and would not accept any intrusion into its waters. The agreement was accidentally (according to later historians) broken by Rome in 282, when a fleet of Roman ships was thrown off of its intended course and ended up in waters that were exclusive to Tarentum by the terms of the treaty. Thinking that Rome had intentionally sent ships into its waters and probably wary of the possibility that Rome was looking to expand into its territories, Tarentum attacked the ships, destroying the small fleet.



*Illustration 6: Greek-influenced ceramics from the colonial period of Tarentum*

The intrusion and subsequent destruction of the fleet, whether or not it was truly accidental (a marked possibility, as sudden storms in the Mediterranean have long been recorded to be responsible for throwing fleets off course) sparked a diplomatic crisis between Rome and Tarentum. Representatives from Rome were unable to come to a peaceful resolution with the Greek colony city. This was likely partially due to the existence of two distinct political parties in the city at the time, each of which had very different aims and objectives. Since Tarentum had adopted democracy after a long period of oligarchical rule by its noble class, both the common representatives and, to a lesser extent, the nobility still held power in the city and were able to influence policy. Thus, the Roman ambassadors would

have been met with a very difficult diplomatic situation in which two opposing parties would have to be simultaneously appeased to avoid war. When this task proved impossible, Rome found itself with no recourse but to go to war with a Tarentum that was now very much opposed to it. Doing so would not only put Rome in conflict with another extremely powerful city, but would also bring the city-states of Greece itself into the growing list of Rome's enemies.

The first act of the Pyrrhic War occurred in 281 BCE, when a Roman army moved south toward Tarentum on a preliminary expedition against the city. This army was led by Lucius Aemilius Barbula, one of the two consuls for the year. This army, exacting revenge for the destruction of the Roman fleet and the refusal of Tarentum's leadership to settle matters diplomatically, raided the countryside and even staged an attack on the city itself. Like many similar expeditions in ancient Mediterranean warfare, this attack from Rome would have had dire economic implications, but would probably not have posed an existential threat to Tarentum. Nevertheless, the Greek city, once attacked, opted for total war against Rome. Rallying the enemies of Rome throughout Italy, including the much reduced Samnites and Etruscans (neither of which could possibly have faced Rome again on their own), Tarentum created an alliance meant to stop Rome's expansion once and for all. In order to accomplish this goal, the city also called on one of its allies from Greece, the city-state of Epirus. Tarentum had previously supported Epirus and its king, Pyrrhus (for whom this war is eponymously named) in its wars, and now was the



time for that support to be reciprocated.



*Illustration 7: Bust of Pyrrhus  
(wearing battle helmet).*

In 280 BCE, an army from Epirus landed in Italy to support Tarentum in the war it was now engaged in with Rome. The army, led by Pyrrhus himself, consisted of 20,000 Greek infantrymen, with about another 5,000 troops consisting of archers, cavalry and other specialized units accompanying the force. Though Rome was militarily powerful (about this, there can be no question, even so early in Roman history), armies

from across the known world had met Greek infantry forces in battle and found themselves completely overwhelmed by the Greeks' heavy armor, long spears and almost impenetrable phalanx formation. The Romans, who would one day become the greatest military power in the world, were now to face off against a style of fighting that had rarely been bested in battle. Indeed, until the development of the more well-known legion formation in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the Romans themselves had used a variation of the phalanx adopted from Greek influence conveyed to them through the Etruscans.

The same year that Pyrrhus arrived in Italy, the armies of Tarentum and Epirus, as well as other Greek colonies in Italy, would meet the Roman legions at the Battle of Heraclea. The battle is named for the Greek colonial province in which it occurred, Heraclea, which was just to the west of Tarentum. Pyrrhus, in one final effort to end the conflict without bloodshed, offered to act as a broker for a diplomatic solution between Rome and Tarentum. Rome, possibly seeing the advantage of conquering the Greek colonies and further expanding its power in Italy as well as besting a foe from Greece itself, refused the offer. The legions of Rome moved toward the position of the Greek army near Heraclea, setting the stage for the great battle that was about to occur.

Upon meeting, the Roman legions and the collective Greek forces each tried to pierce the lines of the other. Both used military formations that had proven to be disproportionately effective against

other offensive and defensive formations in the field. The Roman commander, Publius Valerius Laevinus, had seemingly brought the battle to a draw, a feat rarely accomplished against a Greek force in an infantry battle. However, Pyrrhus had one other tool that he could deploy to break the stalemate. Prior to leaving his own lands to sail to Italy, the king of Epirus had concluded an alliance with his neighbor, the king of Macedon. Not only did this guarantee him a friendly force nearby that would ensure peace and stability in his kingdom while he fought in Italy, but it also gained him another group of additional troops, committed to him by the king of Macedon as a show of good faith. Among the Macedonian units given to Pyrrhus had been 20 war elephants. The war elephant was an unusual type of cavalry, having been originally brought from India when the subcontinent had been connected to the Near East by the overarching political and military structure of the Achaemenid Persian Empire. When Alexander the Great had conquered this empire about half a century before, the war elephant was adopted by the Macedonians. Because of the many wars they had fought with the Persians, the Greeks were also fairly familiar with the elephant as a tool of war. The Romans, however, never having ventured substantially away from their own European peninsula, were totally unaware of them.

One can only imagine the surprise, shock and fear that would have spread through the Roman lines when Pyrrhus, desperately looking for a way to break the stalemate between the two armies, deployed his 20 war elephants into the field at Heraclea. The Roman cavalry broke

lines first, swiftly followed by the infantry. In reality, elephants were often unwieldy and unpredictable on the battlefield, making them at best a difficult asset to make use of. However, the situation at Heraclea perfectly suited the one predictable use of the elephant: surprising enemies who had never encountered it before. With the Romans in disarray from the introduction of the strange foreign beasts to the battle, Pyrrhus committed more ordinary cavalry units capable of fast, mobile striking to further exploit the disorganization of the Roman line. The Romans, now not being able to regroup and hold their positions, fell into a retreat before the phalanxes of the Greek army launched another full frontal assault.

In a rare instance, Rome had truly been bested in a pitched battle. Though the legions had held up well against even the phalanx formation, Pyrrhus' timely use of his elephants and cavalry had turned the tables of the battle decidedly against Rome. This, however, was far from enough to undo the military juggernaut that was Rome. If he wanted to achieve strategic victory, Pyrrhus still had a long road ahead of him. Having handed Rome a serious defeat in the field, Pyrrhus was able to rally some of the states of southern Italy that had fallen under Roman influence to his cause, creating an even larger force that was then able to begin sweeping upward toward central Italy, the heart of Rome's power and influence.

The Romans, however, were not so easily defeated. Although he had beaten the legions at Heraclea, the army, after retreating, remained in

the field to wait for another opportunity. This simple fact probably saved Rome from suffering an existential crisis not long after Heraclea. Once Pyrrhus had amassed his larger army and begun to press north, his forces came dangerously close to Rome itself, penetrating the lands around it and staging raids in the outlying areas. At the nearest point, the Greek-led army would have been a march of a mere two days away from Rome itself, the nearest any army had come to actually threatening the city since the time of the Senone invasion. The Romans, knowing that Pyrrhus could not be allowed to advance any farther, sent an army to intercept him and block his path to Rome. Had he been fighting that army alone, Pyrrhus probably could have achieved victory and cleared a nearly unimpeded path to the great city itself. However, the legions that had fought him at Heraclea were still in the field, and the Greek king knew that they would be following his progression northward to defend Rome as best they could. Pyrrhus, suddenly faced with the military reality of an army in front of him and another some unknown distance to his rear, took the cautious route of withdrawing from his position without sparking another battle. Rome itself was safe from the threat of a nearby enemy army, but would now have to find a way to eliminate the military force that had come so close to endangering the city.

By the campaigning season of 279 BCE, Rome was faced with a critical decision. Pyrrhus had withdrawn into the Greek colonial region of Apulia, which represents the so-called “heel” of the boot-shaped Italian peninsula. Pyrrhus had bested Rome in the field,

though at great cost to his own armies, before withdrawing against the threat of the two combined armies near Rome the year before. The Romans could now either secure their own borders and press for peace with an enemy that was no longer threatening them directly or attack Apulia and risk broader confrontations with the city-states of Greece. The Romans, rarely conservative in matters of military expansion, decided upon the latter course. A large part of this decision was probably the promise of the economic benefit that could be had if the cities of Apulia were brought under Roman power. Not long after Rome had been presented with this choice, a new Roman army was marching toward Apulia with the intent of defeating Pyrrhus once and for all.

This army was led by Publius Decius Mus, the son of the commander of the same name who had famously committed *Devotio* at Sentinum during the Third Samnite War. This army, consisting of about 40,000 men, had also been equipped with several experimental methods of dealing with the war elephants that had been used at Heraclea. These included flaming projectiles meant to frighten the animals and send them into an unpredictable frenzy and Roman chariots onto which spears had been mounted to attack the elephants directly. This demonstrates nicely one of the many reasons that Rome would one day become the military master of the known world, which was its ability to innovate and change when new military tactics were encountered in the field. This would be a consistent theme of the Roman army for the entire history of Rome, with legions adapting

their tactics to best defeat fighting styles of peoples from Britain to the Near East.

The second clash between Rome and the army of Pyrrhus would take place in northern Apulia, near the city of Asculum. By this time, Pyrrhus was commanding a hybrid force made up of his own troops, Macedonian units that had been given to him by his recent ally, troops from the Greek colonial cities and several Italic peoples (including, somewhat predictably, the Samnites). When the two armies positioned themselves against each other, they selected ground that was filled with difficult terrain, including forests and lines of hills that made the use of cavalry difficult and hindered the easy movement of troops around the battlefield. This resulted in the first day of fighting at the Battle of Asculum being essentially a contest for command of the high ground of the battlefield, a situation that creates striking parallels between descriptions of this battle's early phases and those of the much more modern American Battle of Gettysburg. Besides the struggle for the strategically important high ground, each side scored at least limited blows against the other. The Romans successfully broke through the Greek line and managed a raid of Pyrrhus' camp. Though probably unnerving, this blow was relatively light, being that the Romans were driven out quickly. The Greeks, for their part, managed to inflict substantial damage to the left flank of the Roman army. By the end of the day, however, neither side had clearly gained the upper hand against the other.

The beginning of the second day at Asculum would see a massive coordinated attack from Pyrrhus, who here more than at any other point in his career demonstrated his command abilities. The first move from the Greeks came early in the morning, when cavalry units were moved to the highest ground on the battlefield to deny it to the Romans. Next, a massive frontal assault was undertaken by the Greek infantry, supported by reserve cavalry that had been held back behind the center of Pyrrhus' line during the first day of fighting. This assault proved incredibly costly for Pyrrhus, but not attacking the Romans now would almost certainly have set him up for a defeat. Finalizing his strategy, Pyrrhus committed his war elephants, which despite the Roman preparations for them, once again succeeded in breaking through the lines. Once again, once a gap had appeared for the Greeks to exploit, the Romans could not reform or gain control of their lines again, as Pyrrhus kept constant pressure on them with a continued and unrelenting assault from his own lines. Accounts vary on this point, but Publius Decius Mus, commander of the Roman army, may have also been killed in battle at this point (it is also possible that he survived the battle). With the Greeks once again having succeeded in creating a gap and exploiting it, the Roman legions and their allies were forced to withdraw from the field, defeated for the second time.

Another item of historical interest also comes from the Battle of Asculum. Pyrrhus, though causing the Romans to retreat and remaining in command of the field when the battle was over, suffered extremely high casualties thanks to the necessity of a full charge



against the Roman line combined with the deaths of the first day. Thus, a victory such as Asculum, in which an army is left in command of the field but suffers casualties or other setbacks so high as to have made the battle hardly a victory in anything but the technical sense, has since that time been dubbed a Pyrrhic victory after the king of Epirus.

Rome would soon encounter a stroke of good fortune that was much needed after two consecutive defeats at the hands of Pyrrhus. In addition to having colony cities on the Italian mainland, Greek city-states had long before established colonies on the island of Sicily. These colonies were now under the rule of Carthage, an ancient city in modern Tunisia that had been founded by the Phoenicians in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Carthage, drawing on the rich resources of northern Africa and the massive trading and military capabilities of the Phoenician naval tradition, had established itself as the primary power of the western Mediterranean while Rome was still in the process of building up its power base in central and southern Italy. Though Carthage and Rome would soon engage each other in a series of incredibly costly wars, it was Pyrrhus, not the leaders of Rome, who would first attack Carthaginian Sicily to restore the autonomy of the Greek colonies there.

In 278 BCE, Pyrrhus left Italy's mainland to redeploy his army into Sicily and retake it from Carthage. Although this was a substantial opportunity for the king of Epirus to gain control over the wealthy

Sicilian colonial cities, it left Rome free to recover from the two defeats it had suffered at his hands. The war, however, was not over. In Italy, the peoples who had allied with Pyrrhus, as well as the city of Tarentum itself, continued to fight against Rome, though it was now becoming increasingly clear that the departure of the king of Epirus had crippled the ability of this anti-Roman coalition to fight effectively against the Roman legions. Of those who had allied against Rome at the beginning of the Pyrrhic War, only Tarentum was now able to offer serious resistance while Pyrrhus fought in Sicily.

The rebuilding of the badly damaged Roman military and the increasing pressure against those peoples, cities and states that had allied against it would continue until the situation again changed in 275 BCE, the final year of the Pyrrhic War. Pyrrhus, having ventured to Sicily and achieved impressive victories against the Carthaginians early on, had become widely unpopular when his policy toward the Greek cities there began to grow more and more authoritarian. Soon, his armies were in danger of being caught up in a conflict with the very cities he had redeployed to Sicily to wrench from Carthaginian control while at the same time having to continue to fight the forces of Carthage. Seeing his opportunities on the island rapidly crumbling, Pyrrhus once again moved his armies, returning to the Italian mainland for the last stage of the war, which would see him face off against the rebuilt armies of Rome once more.

At the time that Pyrrhus re-entered Italy, one of the consuls of Rome

was a political leader of Plebian birth named Manius Curius Dentatus. Dentatus had already served as consul at least once before and was appointed to lead the armies of Rome against the renewed threat from the foreign king. Though still formidable, Pyrrhus now had little chance of actually defeating Rome in battle. His armies had been depleted and exhausted by the Italian and Sicilian campaigns, and he was now facing a Roman military that he had inadvertently given time and space to rebuild. This strategic miscalculation on the part of Pyrrhus would ultimately undo all of the gains that he had made in twice defeating the Roman legions, as he could not bring more troops to refresh his own ranks as the Romans had done while he was in Sicily.

Dentatus would meet the returning armies of Pyrrhus near the city of Beneventum, which lay south of Rome along the western side of the Italian peninsula. Pyrrhus would once again put up a good fight against the Romans, as it is unclear whether or not either side could truly be said to have won this battle. However, the power Pyrrhus had once brought to bear against the legions had dissipated. Under Dentatus, the recovered legions of Rome stood their ground against the Greek assault, even holding their lines firm against the war elephants that had been their undoing the last two times they had met the Greeks in the field. The battle does not seem to have been a decisive victory, but Rome ultimately remained in command of Beneventum afterward, while Pyrrhus returned to Tarentum to take up a defensive position. The king of Epirus, who once had posed a

serious threat even to the city of Rome itself, had at last been beaten, albeit mostly as a result of poor planning in diverting his forces to Sicily to fight Carthage while the war in Italy continued.

Not long afterward, Pyrrhus would withdraw his forces from Italy, returning to Greece after realizing that the defeat of Rome was not practically achievable after the Battle of Beneventum. This, for all intents and purposes, left the Greek colonies of southern Italy, collectively known as Magna Graecia, open for Roman conquest. Over the course of the next three years, Roman power extended to the south and east, gradually encompassing the Greek colonial cities.

The Pyrrhic War may seem like a somewhat minor event in Roman history, but it was a very important step in the process of Rome's expansion outside of Italy by virtue of being the first conflict in which Roman armies clashed with another major power from the Mediterranean. Indeed, Rome had defeated an army representing the greatest infantry power in the nearby region, that of ancient Greece. Now, the Roman Republic would soon find itself in conflict with the great naval power of the Mediterranean in its time: Carthage.

## ***The First Punic War***

Given the proximity of the two powers between southern Italy and

the island of Sicily, it comes as no surprise that Rome and Carthage, both in expansionist phases of their history, would clash where the boundaries of their influence met. Although this conflict would not actually begin until 264 BCE, its roots go back to what would have otherwise been extremely obscure events taking place in the early 280s BCE. Beginning in that time, two groups of soldiers turned mercenaries had decided to carve out their own small and autonomous principalities, one in the extreme east of Sicily and one just across the sea in the far southwest of Italy. The group that seized power in mainland Italy was eventually ousted by the Romans, who retook the area that they had claimed. Those mercenaries who had established themselves in Sicily, however, remained unhindered for a time because of the lack of a Roman presence on the island.

Before long, however, this group of mercenaries found themselves at odds with the recently-appointed Hiero II, a military tyrant and former ally of Pyrrhus who had been selected to rule over the city of Syracuse after the king of Epirus had left Sicily to return to Italy. Hiero, commanding a force that must have been much larger and better equipped, quickly defeated the mercenaries in battle, prompting them to solicit assistance from Carthage and Rome to defend their stronghold at Messana. Rome, after much debate regarding the wisdom of allowing Carthage to project its military power so close to Roman territories, decided to provide protection to Messana and troops to fight against Syracuse themselves.

These early phases of the war were wrought with political importance. Rome and Carthage had forged a tacit alliance during the time that Pyrrhus had been active in Sicily, mostly owing to the fact that both of them wanted his armies expelled from their spheres of influence. That alliance, however, was untenable once the common enemy had been sent back to Greece. Making matters worse was the fact that the mercenaries based at Messana had appealed to Rome and Carthage for help at almost exactly the same time, but Carthage had actually agreed to lend their assistance first. The Carthaginians even sent a fleet to alleviate the pressure on Messana from Syracuse. However, after this had been accomplished, the Carthaginian military presence in Messana remained, causing great concern there. Thus, when Messana rejected the Carthaginians in favor of Rome, the two great powers were effectively pulled into a proxy war over control of Sicily, which would otherwise have more or less been in the hands of Carthage by default.

To lead the Roman legions into Sicily, a consul named Appius Claudius Caudex was chosen. Caudex had been a staunch supporter of sending troops to Messana and had acted as one of the leading voices that eventually convinced Rome to send an army. When the force under Caudex arrived in Sicily in 264 BCE, the Carthaginians had mostly withdrawn from Messana, moving the bulk of their force away and leaving a resistance force that was more there to represent Carthaginian power and presence than to actually pose any kind of practical military threat. This light resistance at Messana, however,

did not signal that the Carthaginians had decided not to engage with Rome. Rather, they had moved the bulk of their forces elsewhere to both position themselves for the general war for Sicily and to prepare an attack on Messina and the forces of Rome later on.

Shortly after the arrival of the Roman army in Messina, forces from Carthage and Syracuse, which had made common cause with each other after Messina appealed to Rome for help, arrived outside the city to attack it. Had these forces managed to expel the Romans from Sicily at this early stage, it might well have led to a cessation of hostilities. Claudex, apparently preferring not to fight in the position in which he found himself, dispatched representatives to the camps of both of his enemies in an attempt to negotiate a diplomatic solution (presumably one that would have achieved the Roman military goal of leaving Messina free of Carthaginian influence). Neither of his opponents, however, was prepared to leave, and so a battle became inevitable.

Despite the fact that Claudex had not wanted to engage with both the armies of Syracuse and Carthage from his position in Messina, the Roman armies were victorious against both enemies. This victory at the same time secured Messina and forced the army of Syracuse to retreat to its home city, opening up a path for the Romans to move farther into Sicily. Exploiting the victory near Messina, Appius Claudius Claudex next took his army on the offensive to Echetla, another Sicilian city that had apparently combined against Messina

with Syracuse and the Carthaginians. Caudex was, however, shortly forced to return to Messana, as his armies had encountered heavy resistance in Echetla and were too distant from Rome to easily bring reinforcements.

The next year, Rome would gain a major ally in Sicily, deepening the divides on the island between Roman and Carthaginian authority. That ally, ironically, would be Hiero of Syracuse. Although he and his city had initially combined against Rome with Carthage, Hiero would defect to the Roman side in 263 BCE, probably seeing greater advantage as an ally of Rome than as an ally of the Carthaginians, who had been quite heavy-handed with their allies in Sicily up to that point. Hiero was, apparently, even willing to pay a fine in silver for his actions against Rome in order to gain Roman favor. Though such alliances forged out of necessity in a war rarely remain a permanent fixture, Hiero would actually prove to be a staunch supporter of the Romans for the rest of his reign.

Syracuse was not the only state to make peace with Rome. Indeed, the smaller city of Catania had already shifted over to support Rome over Carthage, and other Sicilian cities would soon follow. By 262 BCE, Sicily was deeply divided between pro-Roman and pro-Carthaginian regions, and Carthage was preparing to insert a much larger presence into the island to defeat the Roman armies, now under the command of the consuls Lucius Postumius Megellus and Quintus Mamilius Vitulus. At the end of 263 BCE, there may have been some



hope in Rome for peace in Sicily, as significant territorial gains had been made there and the Carthaginians had not put a major force of their own into battle against Rome. However, as the campaigning season of 262 began, it would have rapidly become clear that peace was not an option. Aside from a Carthaginian fleet and army being prepared to move into Sicily, the north African city-state was also bringing mercenary forces into its ranks from around the western Mediterranean. This escalation on the part of Carthage prompted the commitment of additional legions by Rome, and a more serious conflict between the two was practically ensured.

Rome and Carthage would finally clash that year at the Battle of Agrigentum, named for a city on the southwestern coast of the island of Sicily where it occurred. Agrigentum was chosen by the Romans for the site of their first major conflict with a Carthaginian force because of its strategic importance on the island and most likely also because of the fact that it could easily have been used as a base of operations for launching Carthaginian fleets to attack mainland Italy. The Roman army arrived at Agrigentum and laid siege to it in order to take the city. The Carthaginian ruler and commander of Agrigentum, Hannibal Gisco, however, had already prepared for such a move by bringing the inhabitants of the nearby areas into the city for protection. Though this prevented the Roman armies from attacking these people in less-defended areas, it also left the agriculturally productive regions around Agrigentum more or less undefended. The Roman army, being so far from its base of operations, began to harvest some of the crops

to supplement its supply of available food. When this project began, however, the Carthaginian garrison at Agrigentum saw its opportunity and launched a rapid assault on the Romans in the fields.

The quick and unexpected attack on the Roman soldiers as they gathered food from Agrigentum's fields was highly effective in catching them off guard, but did little in terms of achieving a strategic victory. The Romans, though in disarray, were able to fend off the attack and withdraw to their camp, which had also come under attack from the Carthaginians. Once the Roman army had reformed, Hannibal Gisco's plan of defeating them with his much smaller garrison force became untenable, and the Carthaginians once again withdrew to the city. A siege of some five months would now begin, as Agrigentum could not defeat the army camped on its doorstep. While the Roman legions patiently waited for the city to run out of food and supplies, however, an army that could pose a legitimate threat to them was being massed to come relieve Hannibal Gisco.

This force, which may have numbered as many as 56,000 total men plus 60 war elephants, would be commanded by a Carthaginian general named Hanno. This general, though, would not be as easy to defeat as some that the Romans had encountered during their war in Sicily. Hanno, based on the accounts of his lead-up to the Battle of Agrigentum, was an able strategist and an excellent tactician. To begin his movements in Sicily, Hanno would cut both the Roman lines of supply and communication back to their allied state in Syracuse,

leaving the Roman legions undersupplied and unable to receive new intelligence in the field. Hanno next tricked the Roman cavalry into a trap set in advance by him when he ordered his own cavalry to engage them and then retreat. The Romans, pursuing the cavalry of Hanno in what they felt sure was a victory, were led straight into a Carthaginian infantry column that inflicted heavy casualties on them, further deepening the losses of Rome.

Next, Hanno would establish himself outside of the Roman lines, effectively sandwiching the army of the two consuls between Agrigentum and his own camp. For the Roman consuls, matters now became desperate. Though there had been crops to harvest earlier on, it was now too late in the year to forage enough food for an army the size of the Roman force. With all supply lines cut and no relief force on the way to reopen them, the Roman army needed a definitive battle to break free before hunger took its toll. Hanno was, at this point, reluctant to engage in such a battle, given that his victory was practically assured if he could wait the Romans out. With Hannibal Gisco trapped inside Agrigentum by the Roman army that still surrounded it, however, this strategy was not conducive to the goal of liberating the Carthaginian force inside the city. Eventually, Hanno was forced to attack the Roman lines, and the Battle of Agrigentum began.

Though the army of Rome had been badly affected by hunger, it was nevertheless able to attain victory at Agrigentum. The battle itself

played out with the Romans breaking through the lines of the Carthaginian army under Hanno. Though this gave Hannibal Gisco enough time to lead his small force out of the city, it was insufficient to turn the tide against the Romans. When the army of Hanno finally broke under the pressure of the Roman assault, the Carthaginian army retreated, having suffered an embarrassing defeat at the hands of the Roman legions in the first major battle of the Punic Wars.

After Agrigentum, the war would turn to a new frontier for the Romans: naval combat. Carthage was, without any serious doubt, the greatest naval power in the western Mediterranean at this time, giving it a distinct advantage in moving troops into Sicily and engaging in naval battles. Over the next two years, Rome struggled to put together its first true battle fleet. Even though the Carthaginians drew on centuries of rich naval tradition, Rome's military adaptability once again came into play and allowed it to build an impressive fleet. The naval contest between the two would first manifest itself two years after Agrigentum, in the Battle of Mylae, where Rome's first admiral and the consul for the year of 260 BCE, Gaius Duilius, would put Roman naval engineering to the test.

Mylae was a large sea battle occurring off of the northern coast of Sicily. A fleet of 130 Carthaginian ships met with a roughly equal fleet of Roman ships. At first, Carthage would have appeared to have had every possible advantage because of its long-standing domination of maritime matters in the Mediterranean. As the battle commenced,

however, a new Roman invention quickly turned the tide. This device was known as the *corvus*, a ramp-like system that could be extended from Roman ships to allow Roman soldiers to board an enemy vessel. This allowed Rome to make use of its superior conventional soldiers in naval combat, robbing the Carthaginians of some of their disproportionate advantage at sea. In a hugely unexpected turn of events, the Roman fleet was able to defeat the Carthaginian fleet using this unusual naval tactic, scoring the first important naval victory of the First Punic War.

For the next two years, fighting in and around Sicily continued with the Romans consistently gaining ground against the Carthaginian forces there. A major Carthaginian counteroffensive took place in 259 BCE, but by the following year the gains made by Carthage during that campaign had been almost completely undone by a renewed Roman offensive into the portions of the island controlled by Carthage. Sicily, though the main theater of the war, was soon to take a secondary position in Roman military policy, as the leadership of Rome decided in 256 BCE to attack Carthaginian controlled states in northeastern Africa. By this point in the war, the Romans had defeated the Carthaginians on both land and sea, and there was now little doubt that the great power that Rome was rapidly becoming was capable of going toe to toe with Carthage, even in its own territories.

Rome first built a new fleet, much larger than its first, to convey troops into Africa, where they would take advantage of a relatively

small Carthaginian military presence caused by a high degree of stability in the areas immediately surrounding Carthage. This fleet was commanded by the consuls for 256, Marcus Atilius Regulus and Lucius Manlius Vulso. The first phase of this invasion was a naval battle known as the Battle of Cape Ecnomus, in which the Roman fleet was forced to fight its way through a major Carthaginian fleet commanded by Hanno and a general named Hamilcar who had fought successfully against Rome in Sicily during the 259 BCE counteroffensive. (Note: This Hamilcar should not be confused with his contemporary Hamilcar Barca, who was the father of the famous Carthaginian general Hannibal). The Battle of Cape Ecnomus ended in victory for Rome, although the Carthaginians had adapted their naval tactics to make the *corvus* a less effective tool. Now, Rome's armies were granted free access to the northern coast of Africa, where the next phase of the First Punic War would take place.

Upon landing in Africa, the Roman army first targeted the city of Aspis, a major power center in the region that was not far from Carthage itself. The city, rather than being taken by storm, was besieged, likely to limit the potential liability to the Roman army. Aspis fell, and the Roman force had gained its first major victory in the home territory of Carthage. The Roman consuls then fortified themselves in the town and began to pillage the surrounding areas to gather resources and slaves to be sent back to Rome while they waited on further instructions from the Senate. When these instructions finally arrived, it was announced that the Roman force in Africa was

to be divided, with Regulus being left in Carthaginian territory with two legions (about 15,000 men), while Vulso was recalled to Rome along with the vast majority of the fleet and the spoils of war that had been gathered during their time in Aspis.

Not long afterward, the legions remaining in Africa began making their way to the city of Adys, another of the major cities in the near vicinity of Carthage. This time, they would be met with a much more serious resistance force. Two Carthaginian generals, Hasdrubal and Bostar, had already been dispatched into the field. The forces under these two leaders were now joined by those of Hamilcar, who had been brought back from Sicily to attend to the defenses in Africa. Even with this larger force, however, the Carthaginians were wary of engaging in a pitched battle with the legions. In order to position themselves in the most conservative and cautious way possible, the Carthaginian forces made camp on a hill near where the Romans had taken up their position near Adys. This defensive strategy would, however, avail the Carthaginians nothing. Just after the Carthaginian position had been established on the hill, the Roman legions moved into an encircling position around it by night. At daybreak, Roman legionnaires advanced up the hill from multiple directions, dealing the Carthaginians a massive defeat, although one that was hard-won because of the better Carthaginian defensive position.

A path now opened up before Regulus toward the city of Carthage itself, with little more than an already beaten Carthaginian army

standing between it and the legions under his command. Worse, Carthage was besieged with refugees because of a rebellion among the Numidians, a people centered in what is today Algeria, who were wreaking havoc in the power vacuum created by the Roman presence in Carthaginian territories. With a shortage of food, refugees coming in and the legions of Rome practically at their doorstep, the Carthaginians were in a situation that can only be described as desperate. However, the great power of northern Africa was not yet prepared to surrender. A last ditch effort against Rome would now be made to stop Regulus from advancing to Carthage itself.

Carthage, it had been proven, could not defeat Rome on its own. However, there was one power left in the world whose military prowess was still greater even than that of Rome: the city-state of Sparta in the southern part of Greece. Though Sparta was past its high point as the ultimate power in Greece, its military tradition remained strong, and out of this tradition had come a mercenary commander named Xanthippus. This commander was hired by Carthage to devise a way for its armies to defeat the Roman legions of Regulus, which were now mere miles from Carthage itself.

The resulting battle is alternately known as the Battle of Tunis or the Battle of the Bagraades. Regulus marched his armies toward Carthage and encountered Xanthippus, who had prepared a strategy that he correctly believed would cripple the Romans. Almost as soon as the battle began, Xanthippus deployed the 100 war elephants he had



managed to amass, overwhelming the Roman line. Just on the tail of this attack came a rapid strike of traditional cavalry. Xanthippus correctly reasoned that if he could create holes in the Roman line with such attacks, he could defeat them with his own infantry, which he had organized into a phalanx formation. Not only did Xanthippus succeed, but he even defeated the legions with a force smaller than that of Regulus. The Spartan, though brought in at the last moment as the final option, had succeeded in his task and thoroughly defeated the Roman legions. By the end of the battle, only 2,000 Romans had escaped to later be extracted by the remaining ships of the fleet near Africa. In the supreme humiliation for Rome, Regulus himself was taken prisoner, cementing the victory of Xanthippus and Carthage. Regulus was probably put to death later by the Carthaginians, though later Roman historians offer an almost certainly apocryphal tale in which he returned to Rome as a Carthaginian prisoner to offer peace terms from Carthage but instead urged the Senate to continue its attack on Carthaginian Sicily.

With the African campaign shattered, the focus of the war shifted back to Sicily. Rome, seeking revenge for the destruction of its legions in Africa and the capture of Regulus, brought even more pressure to bear on the regions of Sicily where the Carthaginians still held sway. Across the years 252 and 251 BCE, Carthaginian influence in Sicily was gradually pushed farther and farther back, until Carthage controlled only the northwestern corner of the island, with Rome controlling everything else (except for Syracuse in the southeast,

which remained independent as a Roman ally). Hamilcar was once again sent to Sicily in hopes that he could repeat his early victories against Roman land forces, but this effort proved only moderately effective.

In 249 BCE, another great naval battle would take place off of the northwestern coast of the island. In this battle, known as the Battle of Drepana, Hamilcar and his chief admiral Adherbal would defeat a Roman fleet of 120 ships under the command of Publius Claudius Pulcher, one of the consuls for 249 BCE. Unlike other naval battles, there would be nothing close about this victory. Hamilcar's fleet destroyed more than three quarters of the Roman fleet, cementing the Carthaginian power over the seas around Sicily.

After Drepana, the Carthaginians gained a renewed hope for victory in Sicily, while Rome did not even begin building a new fleet immediately. However, the victory was too little too late for Carthage, as Rome already controlled the vast majority of Sicily's landmass. In 247 BCE, Hamilcar Barca (the father of Hannibal) arrived in Sicily to begin staging raids on Roman holdings. For six years, the Carthaginian general would carry on a campaign that, though it certainly proved costly to Rome, brought Carthage no closer to strategic victory. The other Hamilcar, too, remained in Sicily in an attempt to keep the Romans from seizing those few parts of the island that were still under Carthaginian control. It was now becoming more and more obvious that Rome had won this war, but a final push was needed to bring it

to an end. That final push would come in 241 BCE when, having recovered from the defeat at Drepana, Rome once again built a fleet to project its power into the seas.



*Illustration 8: Hamilcar Barca, the father of Hannibal who was sent to Sicily late in the First Punic War*

The final major battle of the First Punic War would be the Battle of the Egadi islands, fought off of the western coast of Sicily. The Roman fleet, consisting of some 200 ships, was led by both consuls for that year, Quintus Valerius Falto and Gaius Lutatius Catulus. The Carthaginian fleet was once again under the command of Hanno, and some sources suggest that it was as large as 1,000 ships (however, this number is highly unlikely, and it much more likely that the fleets were of roughly the same size). The Roman fleet first moved to blockade the two main cities in Sicily that were still under Carthaginian control,

namely Drepana and Lilybaeum. The Carthaginian fleet moved to break the blockade, but the Roman ships abandoned it in order to pursue a full sea battle with Hanno.

The morning that the battle began, a wind blowing in from the west gave the Carthaginians (who were coming toward shore from that same direction) a distinct advantage. Catulus, however, decided to engage anyway, probably seeing the chance to crush the enemy fleet once and for all as too good to pass up. In a final effort in which he would risk everything, the consul ordered his ships to be stripped of all but their absolute essential rigging in order to lighten them and close the gap on the Carthaginian advantage from the wind. Thanks to this decision, the wind advantage made little difference, and the Romans gained a massive sea victory. Intriguingly, the site of the Battle of the Egadi Islands is the first ancient naval battle site ever to have been conclusively discovered by modern archaeological researchers. In 2013, a debris field of ancient ship remnants from both Carthaginian and Roman ships was discovered off the coast of Sicily, in the area known to have been the setting for the battle. Included in the finds from this fascinating site were several bronze rams that would have been attached to the front ends of the ships in order to destroy enemy vessels.

Following the defeat at the Egadi Islands, Carthage was forced to begin peace talks with Rome. Even though they had won, the Romans were eager to end the war, which had now dragged on for nearly a

quarter of century and proven costly in both resources and human life. An agreement was finally reached whereby Rome and Carthage would make peace, but Carthage would entirely withdraw from Sicily and take no actions against either Rome or Syracuse. In addition, a heavy fine in silver was levied upon Carthage in the treaty, further depleting the already war-damaged Carthaginian finances. Given the heavy-handed treaty terms that Rome imposed upon its enemy, it is no surprise that the conflicts between Rome and Carthage would flare up again. For the moment, however, peace had been reached.

The First Punic War was a pivotal point in Roman history. In forcing Rome to build a fleet and gain naval prowess, Carthage had turned the dominating city of the Italian Peninsula into a maritime power capable of projecting military force throughout the Mediterranean, a capability it had shown during the African campaign of Regulus. Thanks to the First Punic War, Rome had also fully evolved into a power of the Mediterranean, now having defeated even the powerful Carthage. Though this was far from the end of Rome's development and growth, the first war with the Carthaginians was certainly one of the most important phases of expansion in Roman history.

## ***Second Punic War***

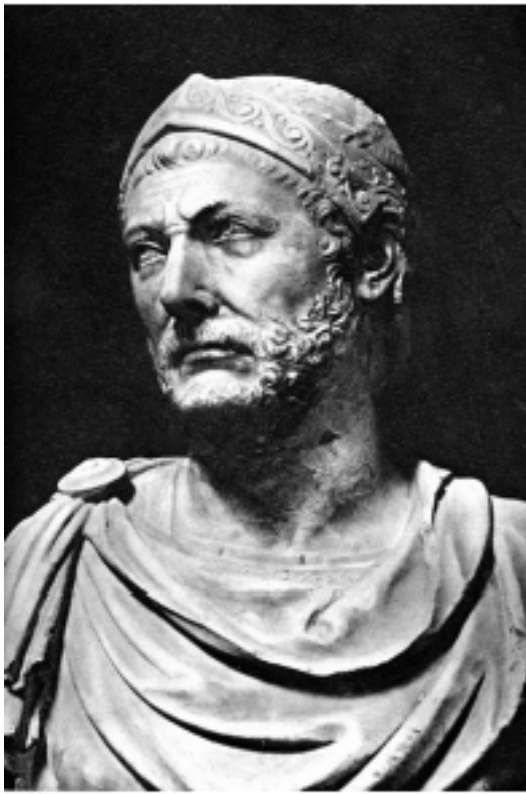
The years following the First Punic War were a relatively stable time

for Rome, although the massive expenses of the war would have continued to have economic impacts for years after the signing of the Carthaginian peace treaty. During this time, an important historical landmark was also reached: the formal creation of the first Roman province in Sicily. Though Roman colonial areas in Italy had served much the same function for decades, provinces would become the large administrative areas that would one day make up Rome's empire. Thus, the creation of the very first one encompassing the island of Sicily (except for Syracuse) was a development that would have far-reaching effects once Rome began to accumulate larger and more far-flung territories.

It was also in these years that Rome began to move north into those regions of Italy it did not yet control. In the northern regions of the peninsula, known to the Romans as Cisalpine Gaul, Celtic peoples had begun to band together, presumably for the purpose of pushing south. In 225 BCE, Roman forces invaded the north, conquering it over the course of a campaign that lasted for nearly five years. Though a great military undertaking, the conquest of Cisalpine Gaul would have seemed relatively minor in comparison to the First Punic War. This invasion, however, stirred up even more resentment among the Celtic peoples of northern Italy, a sentiment that would not be long in manifesting itself once more in the coming war.

This stability, however, would not last long. In 219 BCE, only 22 years after the First Punic War had ended, Carthaginian forces laid

siege to the city of Saguntum, located on the eastern coast of the Iberian Peninsula. Though originally founded by native Iberian peoples several centuries earlier, Saguntum had become incorporated into the broad trade networks of the Mediterranean through Phoenician contact and subsequent exposure to Greek culture. This led Greek colonists to settle in and around the city, producing a pseudo-Greek locality in eastern Iberia. Because of its close ties to Greek city-states, Saguntum had also been drawn into an alliance with both Greece and Rome against Carthage. The Carthaginians, however, had a massive presence in Iberia, and it would not be long before Saguntum would become a target of military operations. This attack on Saguntum, a city with protected status under its treaty agreement with Rome, would ultimately spark the Second Punic War.



*Illustration 9: Famous bust of Hannibal, the main Carthaginian general of the Second Punic War*

No less important than the implications of an attack on Seguntum was the Carthaginian commander who initiated the attack. This commander was Hannibal Barca, the son of Hamilcar Barca and better known to the modern world simply by the mononym Hannibal. Once Rome declared war for the siege of Saguntum, Hannibal began a massive program of conquests throughout Iberia, adding land and



wealth to the Mediterranean empire held by Carthage. It was now clear to Rome that the military ambitions of Hannibal and of Carthage had to be suppressed. Thus, a Roman army would be sent to Iberia, a place that no Roman force had ever gone before. Already, Hannibal was planning an invasion of the Italian Peninsula from the north, through the Alps that separated it from the rest of Europe. In this endeavor, the Carthaginians had procured the support of the Celtic peoples of northern Italy who had suffered from the Roman invasion of 225 BCE. If Hannibal could reach the Alps, his army would be given support, safe passage and guides to help him navigate the mountains and press south into Italy. Now, it was left to Rome to stop this invasion force.

The new Roman army made its way to Iberia under the command of the consul Publius Cornelius Scipio and his brother Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio, who had served as consul in 222 BCE. Though Hannibal had already crossed into Gaul (modern France and central Europe) and was making his way toward Italy with the support of some Gallic tribes, it was imperative for the Romans to assert control over Iberia in order to cut the supply lines of the massive Carthaginian army moving east under his command. Iberia quickly became a patchwork quilt of Roman, Carthaginian and native Iberian, Celtiberian and Celtic power, with some areas completely untouched by the war and others forever transformed by it. However, the Roman army under the brothers Scipio succeeded in cutting off the supply routes from Carthaginian territory to Hannibal's army. The great Carthaginian

commander was now crossing Gaul without the hope of reinforcements or additional supplies to help his army.

While Hannibal made his way across Gaul (some parts of which were far less welcoming to his army than others), the Celts in northern Italy began a revolt against Rome. Roman forces, pulled from their duties in Iberia, were recalled to attack the north and put down the revolt. However, with a war in Iberia, uprisings in Italy and even increasing Carthaginian presence in Sicily once more, the Romans were beginning to stretch their resources thin. This war was by far the largest conflict Rome had yet been in, geographically speaking. It would now not be long before they could confront their primary enemy, the army of Hannibal, face to face in the field.



*Illustration 10: Hannibal's crossing of the Alps depicted in a sketch.*

By late 218 BCE, Hannibal's army had made it over the Alps, though

the exact route that he took is not definitively known. When he had set out from Iberia, the Carthaginian commander had had more than 50,000 men and many war elephants. By the time he had reached Italy, he found himself in command of just under half of his original expeditionary force, and only a small handful of his elephants had been able to survive in the cold weather of the Alps. Despite his losses from cold, hunger and attacks from native Gallic tribes, Hannibal was now in the territory of his enemy and ready to take advantage of the position he had achieved through one of the boldest military campaigns in ancient history.

Rome would first meet Hannibal at the Battle of Ticinus in November of 218 BCE. A force of Roman soldiers, commanded by Publius Cornelius Scipio, had detached from Iberia and made a rapid sea journey to arrive in northern Italy just ahead of Hannibal. The battle, though the first between Hannibal and his Roman enemies, would be fairly minor, largely taking the form of a fast cavalry engagement. Hannibal, through the use of Numidian cavalry brought with him from northern Africa, was able to defeat the Roman skirmishing force under Scipio, though Scipio's infantry was not defeated. Scipio, who had been wounded in the battle himself, decided to withdraw before Hannibal could mass his entire column for battle the next day, fearing that his escape route to the south would be cut off. Hannibal, therefore, handily won the minor Battle of Ticinus.

The next month, the Romans would engage in a much more major

battle called the Battle of the Trebia. Following the arrival of Hannibal, the Senate had decided to send the other consul for 218 BCE, Tiberius Sempronius Longus, to northern Italy to intercept the Carthaginian army. Up to that point, Longus had been engaged in Sicily, where Carthage had kept up pressure in order to further stretch the military resources of Rome, but where there was little significant threat to Roman power. Moving north with haste, Longus arrived to reinforce the army still under Scipio. With this, the Romans would have been able to field some 40,000 total troops, compared to the 30,000 available to Hannibal with what remained of his invasion force and additional troops contributed from Gallic allies. To alleviate the numerical differences between them, Hannibal formulated a battle strategy whereby he would engage the Romans with only a part of his force, focusing especially on cavalry attacks against the Roman camp to force the Romans into total commitment of their army. Meanwhile, Hannibal's younger brother, Mago, would lay in wait with a force concealed the night before the battle in an overgrown bank on the battlefield. This, combined with the fact that the Romans were forced to cross the river Trebia to engage Hannibal in cold December weather, would make up for the sheer numerical superiority of the Roman army.

Longus, unfortunately, took the bait and attacked, leaving his rear open to the attack from Mago. Though his forces were badly damaged, Longus formed up the center of his line and personally commanded it while it broke through the Carthaginian center, inflicting fairly heavy

losses on his enemy. At the end of the battle, however, Hannibal had come out as the clear victor, inflicting casualties as high as 75 percent on the Roman army while sustaining only about 5,000 casualties of his own. The Roman army was forced to withdraw to encamp for the winter. This defeat would devastate the morale of Rome, but it was a mere preview of what was to come as Hannibal advanced to the south.

Military operations were largely ceased in northern Italy until the spring of 217 BCE, by which time two new consuls had taken up their seats. These two were Gaius Flaminius Nepos and Gnaeus Servilius Geminus, who moved after their elections to position themselves between Hannibal and Rome with the help of the remaining Roman forces in the north, still under the command of Scipio. Amazingly, however, even these three forces failed to cover all of the choke points through the passes of the Appenine mountains. When Hannibal moved south, his army snaked its way through the mountain chain running down the center of the peninsula, completely circumventing the positions where Roman forces had established themselves. The route that Hannibal took was a difficult one, as he ignored the easy passes guarded by the Romans in favor of a route that took him through a difficult to cross marshland. The path through the marsh took a heavy toll on Hannibal's army, including plaguing the commander himself with an eye infection that would eventually cost him his sight in one eye. However, his army made it through undetected by Roman cavalry, which was still stationed at the obvious Appenine passes. When his army exited the marshy land through which it had had to

move to avoid the Romans, it found itself in Etruria, the ancient homeland of the Etruscans that was near to Rome itself.

By this time in Roman history, the Etruscans had almost completely homogenized with the Romans, meaning that there was little chance for Hannibal to easily incite a rebellion in Etruria. He had, however, left the Roman blocking forces under the consuls and Scipio behind him and could now lay in wait for them to pursue him deeper into Roman territory, setting the stage for another ambush. The position he chose for this ambush was at Lake Trasimene, a large lake in north-central Italy (today called Lake Trasimeno). Soon, Gaius Flaminius Nepos broke from his camp in the Apennines and moved south to find Hannibal on his own, a rash action that most of his advisers apparently argued against. When the consul's army reached Lake Trasimene, Hannibal's trap was already set and ready to be sprung.

Along the northern shore of the lake was a natural defile and ring of low, wooded hills that was perfect for an ambush. Having lured the Roman consul from his camp in the Apennines, Hannibal had established part of his army on a ridge, making it conspicuously visible, while other elements, especially his cavalry, remained concealed on the forested parts of the hills, positioning them perfectly for a downward sweeping attack once the Romans had been lured into position below them. The ambush took place once the Roman rear had come into sight of the forces laying in wait, and the Roman column suffered nearly 15,000 casualties, a rate of about 50 percent. Gaius

Flaminius Nepos was himself among the dead, slain as his army attempted to extract itself from the ambush Hannibal had set. Now, with the defeat of a consular army, little stood between Hannibal and Rome, where the Carthaginian commander now turned his sights.



*Illustration 11: Lake Trasimeno as it appears today*

Back in Rome, panic abounded at the threat of a Carthaginian army so near to the city itself and the defeat of the army at Lake Trasimene. Not since the time of Pyrrhus, when the then-king of Epirus had advanced near to Rome, had such a threat existed. As in many times of trouble, the decision was made to elect a dictator to take charge of the military operations against Hannibal. Rome made a fortuitous choice of dictator in the person of Quintus Fabius Maximus, a son of an ancient Patrician family and a long-time political leader. It was this dictator who initiated what has come to be known as the Fabian Strategy, a plan of his own devising in which Roman forces would be deployed not to engage Hannibal in open battles but to harass his



army and check his movements, denying him the absolute mobility that he had enjoyed up to that point when maneuvering around stationary Roman armies. By inflicting casualties incrementally on a force that could not draw new allies from its home base, the new dictator reasoned, he could defeat Hannibal.

Hannibal moved south with Roman armies dogging him to attack Apulia, the region formerly dominated by Greek colony cities. He believed that if he could threaten wealthy pro-Roman cities there, he could lure Quintus Fabius Maximus into a battle of necessity. However, even as Hannibal ravaged the area, the dictator and his forces held off, knowing that their victory lay in playing the long game with Hannibal. Rome, the Senate and even the Plebian tribunes began to grow wary of the strategy, resulting in a high degree of political maneuvering around Maximus in Rome itself. At one point, a younger and less experienced commander decided to engage Hannibal, only to be badly defeated, only confirming the superiority of the long-term Fabian Strategy. However, the strategy was beginning to take its toll. Hannibal, again trying to force Rome into battle, moved back to the north through Samnium and Campania, but once again could not force the dictator to attack.



*Illustration 12: Statue of  
Quintus Fabius Maximus,  
creator of the Fabian  
Strategy*

To ride out the winter, Hannibal returned to Apulia, granting Rome a degree of respite from the threat of the Carthaginian army moving through some of its closest land holdings. In Rome, sentiment was beginning to turn against the dictator, whose strategy was widely perceived as overly cautious and even cowardly. For 216 BCE, two

consuls were elected who both favored a more aggressive approach to the war (though one certainly much more than the other). Thanks to this, a large-scale confrontation in 216 BCE was almost guaranteed by the will of the Roman people. Thus began the inexorable chain of events that would lead to one of the most famous battles of ancient history: the Battle of Cannae.

As spring began in 216, Hannibal's armies were once again able to procure new sources of food from the countryside. The Carthaginian commander, however, needed to force the hand of Rome into a decisive conflict, as the previous year's marches throughout Italy while Rome pursued the Fabian Strategy had yielded him precious little in strategic advantages. In order to force that conflict, Hannibal took a major supply depot near Cannae by force, putting the Carthaginian army directly in the path of one of Rome's major supply lines from the south. Following the capture of the supply depot, it became necessary for the consular armies to move to intercept Hannibal and engage him in a pitched battle, as the loss of the supply line severely reduced the resources available to the Roman army itself.

The consular army moved south. One consul, Gaius Tarentius Varro, had been the prime advocate of aggressive military strategy against Hannibal, a sentiment that his actions in battle would reflect. The other, Lucius Aemilius Paullus, had also tired of the Fabian Strategy, but was more cautious in military matters than Varro. The two consuls would share command, switching off on a daily basis (a custom of

Roman military tradition invoked only when the two consuls shared command of a single army, rather than being given command of their own proprietary legions). The Roman army, 86,400 strong in total, moved toward Cannae to confront Hannibal in a pitched battle.

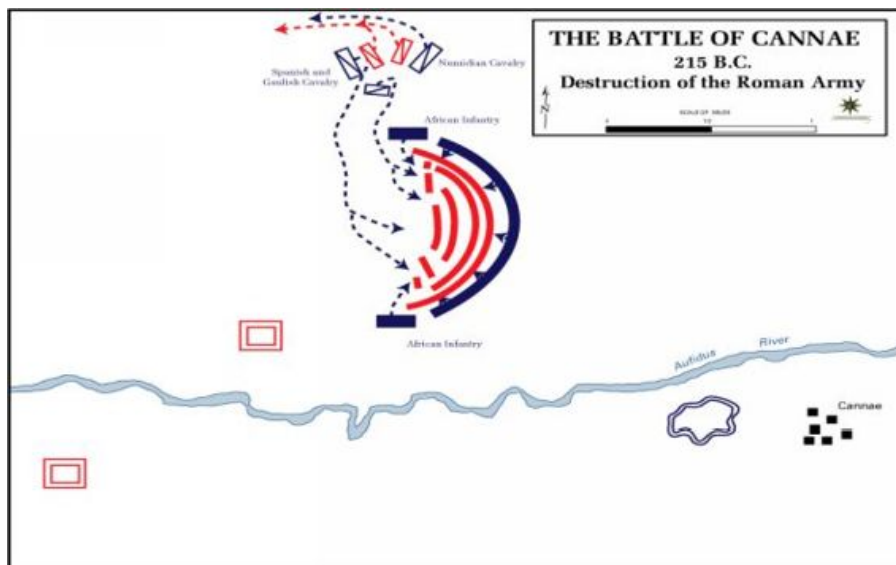
After arriving near the encampment of Hannibal, the Roman army set up a camp instead of attacking immediately. The fixed positions of the army would remain in place for two days, perhaps a delay on the part of the Romans to see if Hannibal would move off from the supply depot in the face of superior numbers without a battle being necessary. If this was a factor in the decision to wait, there may have been some merit in it according to conventional military wisdom. Hannibal's own army was now at 50,000 men, counting the men who had left Iberia with him and the local Gallic forces now allied to him. Given the numerical disparity and the fact that the supply depot was not crucial to him, the Roman commanders may have had good reason to think that Hannibal would leave rather than fight a battle at Cannae. However, the Carthaginian general was just as eager to score a victory against Rome as the Romans had been to defeat him, and so neither army abandoned its position.

Finally, when neither army moved away from the field, the battle began. The two forces initiated an advance toward each other, as was fairly typical of open-field pitched battles of the time. As the Carthaginians moved forward, however, Hannibal's army began to alter its formation. Rather than advancing in tightly defended lines,

the army of Carthage began to thin its own lines. This was a dangerous move, as it made Hannibal's line much more vulnerable to being broken by the Roman legions. As this line met the Roman legions, Hannibal deployed his cavalry in order to engage the Roman cavalry on his right and left flanks. Hannibal had set his trap for the Romans once again, but closing it around them would now be the most dangerous part.

By extending his line to encompass the Roman flanks, Hannibal had created a killing zone between his own flanks. His center, however, was weakened significantly because of the troops that had had to be extended to the right and left. The Roman infantry, though bested in tactics, was still one of the most powerful military forces the world had ever seen. As a result, Hannibal began a slow but inexorable retreat in the center, where he personally commanded, under the pressure of a full frontal assault from the legions of Rome. Though the Carthaginian center was being forced back, however, it was actually the Romans who were under increasing danger. Pushing forward, the Roman legions suddenly found themselves in between the now crescent-shaped flanks of the Carthaginian line, facing enemies on three sides. At last, the flanks of Hannibal's army closed in, attacking the Romans while they were still engaged with the center. Varro and Paullus, having walked directly into Hannibal's encircling movement, were suddenly trapped with no effective means of extricating the legions from engagement with the Carthaginian army. As the battle went on, the legions were systematically destroyed, eventually

suffering casualties that may have exceeded 80 percent. This slaughter of the legions continued all day, until the battle was brought to a close by the onset of darkness. The remaining Romans escaped having suffered one of the worst defeats in Roman military history. Worse, the battle had left a vacant consulship, as Paullus had died in the fighting.



Cannae, the battle that the Romans had hoped would at last bring Hannibal to heel, had turned into a military calamity. Not only had the consular army failed to destroy the Carthaginian army, but Hannibal had only lost about 6,000 of his own soldiers. With a huge part of Rome's military destroyed and the Carthaginian army still active on the peninsula, morale in Rome flagged massively. The city-state that had grown into a Mediterranean power and even outfought Carthage in the First Punic War was now facing a challenge that it could not seem to defeat. Such was the distress in Rome that some sources suggest that the Romans turned to human sacrifice to appease the gods, a tradition that was incredibly rare in Roman history,

especially by this time period. Worse, Rome's allies began to question its absolute supremacy, which up to then had been more or less an established military and political reality since the end of the Pyrrhic War. As Rome faced one of its darkest hours, Hannibal would attempt to worsen matters even more by turning Rome's own allies against it.

For the rest of 217 and through 215 BCE, Hannibal used the respite from Roman intervention against him to build up a substantial network of military allies in the south of Italy, especially in Apulia. Unsurprisingly, the Samnites also joined this new anti-Roman alliance, once again throwing their lot in against the enemy that had defeated them so many times in the past. Aside from simply adding to his support base, Hannibal's plan had much broader implications. By breaking up Rome's circle of alliances and supporters, the Carthaginian general could leave Rome isolated and vulnerable, both at home in Italy and in the broader theaters of the war that were still simmering along at much lower levels in Sicily and Iberia. If he could achieve this, the complete defeat of Rome may have become a serious possibility.

In 215 BCE, another strange twist occurred in the tale of Rome's military history. Philip V, the king of Macedon, saw the chance to expand his land holdings by pushing westward into Illyria, the region of the Balkans just across the Adriatic Sea from Italy (roughly the region between modern-day Slovenia and Albania) and from there aiding Carthage in Italy. The Carthaginians concluded a treaty with

Philip, and a more minor war began in the Balkans, known as the First Macedonian War.

By 214 BCE, Rome had rallied enough from its defeat at Cannae to begin offering serious resistance once more. Though he was no longer in the position of dictator, Quintus Fabius Maximus had returned to prominence in Rome, as his strategy of harassing Hannibal rather than engaging with him had become more popular after Cannae. Maximus had managed to reinvigorate Rome, even as the Carthaginians pulled allies from Rome's sphere of influence. In 214, an army under the consul from the previous year whose military authority had been extended, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, defeated a branch of Carthaginian troops under Hanno (not to be confused with the Carthaginian of the same name prominent in the First Punic War). This battle, near the city of Beneventum, would combine with an earlier defeat of Hanno in 215 BCE to restore Roman confidence in the legions.

Although Hannibal still posed a great threat to domestic security in Italy, the Romans, masters of war that they were despite some setbacks during this war, seem to have hit upon a plan to win the war by fighting it in a broad range of theaters. This strategy, though risky, would spread the resources of Carthage thin, making it difficult for them to decisively win in any region. Iberia, in particular, was a focus of this plan. There, Rome hired thousands of mercenaries from among the Celtiberians, local peoples who were the result of cross-population



between Celtic and native Iberian peoples. Rome, combined with mercenary forces in areas where it could not outnumber Carthage on its own, was now ready to go on the offensive once more.

Sicily and Sardinia, too, would see great amounts of renewed Roman military activity as the war began to expand on all fronts, soon becoming a truly Mediterranean conflict. Hannibal, however, was still in Italy during the early stages of this expansion of the war, and therefore still posed a threat to Rome itself. In 212 BCE, the Roman legions would again find themselves in direct battle with Hannibal. During Rome's resurgence, battles in Italy had begun to retake some of the areas that Hannibal had claimed after Cannae. Among the most important cities that had swung to the Carthaginian side was Capua, a major urban center in Campania. In order to reassert control over their immediate vicinity, legions under the command of the consuls Appius Claudius Pulcher and Quintus Flavius Flaccus made their way to Capua and made camp near the city. Their plan was to launch an attack against Capua when a relief column arrived to reinforce them. However, the relief column was ambushed on the way, causing the Romans to delay the attack while Hannibal sent a cavalry force to relieve Capua. The Carthaginian general himself arrived soon afterwards, executing a rapid march from Tarentum to arrive and disperse the Roman armies. Afterwards, with the Romans seemingly driven out of Campania, Hannibal moved south to Brundisium, in Apulia.

In 211 BCE, Rome began to find allies in Greece, not the least of which was the city-state of Sparta, that would help it to counter the forces of Philip V. Philip, now preoccupied with a series of minor conflicts against Greek city-states, was distracted from lending aid to Carthage, denying the enemies of Rome what no doubt would have otherwise been a supremely useful ally. This state of stalemate in Greece would carry on for most the rest of the Second Punic War, leaving Rome free to dedicate most of its resources to the war effort against Carthage.

For the next several years, the conflicts between Rome and Hannibal's army would take on a form very similar to the engagement at Capua. Roman legions would besiege Italian cities that had fallen into Hannibal's alliance, the Carthaginian army would arrive to relieve the cities and the Romans would eventually move off. Though costly, this strategy began to wear Hannibal's forces down, as they were forced to move to and fro between allied cities. In general, this strategy also prevented disastrous Roman defeats (save for a fairly decisive Roman loss at the Battle of Herdonia in 210 BCE). Now, as Hannibal's years in Italy wore on, the Carthaginian army was losing momentum a bit at a time.

Elsewhere during the coming years, Rome made substantial inroads in defeating Carthaginian forces. In Iberia, a long, costly and drawn out series of battles eventually forced the Carthaginians into retreat. A series of naval victories throughout the Mediterranean also bolstered

Roman standing. Everywhere, now, it seemed that Rome was beginning to claw its way back toward victory, albeit it at immense cost in resources and human life. The final stroke, however, was still to come. The Second Punic War would be ended as the result of a plan concocted by one of the Roman Republic's finest generals, a Patrician named Scipio Africanus.



*Illustration 14:  
Scipio Africanus,  
depicted in a bronze  
profile*

Scipio Africanus was, without question, a man of unparalleled military abilities in Rome in his time. A career soldier from an early age, Scipio had been among the survivors at Cannae when he was only 20. Rising rapidly into command, Scipio had been instrumental in the

final defeat of the Carthaginians in Iberia, earning him a great degree of popularity in both military and political circles in Rome. In 205 BCE, Scipio was elected consul in honor of his vast military achievements. A plan had already hatched in the young general's mind to put a stop to the war once and for all, and he was at last in a position to execute it. To bring Carthage to heel, Scipio reasoned, he would launch an invasion of Africa, much as had been attempted by Regulus in the First Punic War, and challenge the Carthaginians in their own territory.

Though his plan was bold, there was little support for it in the Senate. It has been suggested that envy among Scipio's fellow leaders led to his being given only a small garrison (namely the force then stationed in Sicily). However, it is also possible that this was an event born from perceived military necessity, as the African invasion during the First Punic War had ended so disastrously and Rome could not afford the loss of a massive expeditionary force if circumstances turned against Scipio. When the Roman general finally launched his invasion in 204 BCE, he brought with him only about 35,000 men, many of whom were volunteers pulled together from allied cities. Nevertheless, this force was large enough to seriously threaten Carthage, as most of its armies were dispersed elsewhere.

In 203 BCE, Scipio laid siege to the city of Utica, a major outpost from the time of the Phoenicians that predated the founding of Carthage itself. In response, combined forces of Carthaginians under

Hasdrubal Gisco (a general who had fought against the Roman forces in Iberia) and Numidians under their tribal king Syphax were mobilized to break the siege. When this allied force arrived at Utica, Scipio was forced to withdraw, as his armies were severely outnumbered. Rather than retreating entirely, however, the Roman commander moved off only a little way to establish a strong defensive position on a nearby hill, which he then began to fortify. The Carthaginians, too, made camp in the vicinity. These positions were to be held for the long haul, as winter was beginning to set in and each army's camp became its winter headquarters.

During the course of the winter months, Scipio engaged in peace talks, possibly in order to lull his enemies into a false sense of security by conveying what would be perceived as weakness. Meanwhile, Hasdrubal and Syphax assembled ships to cut off the Roman fleet. Scipio, however, was far more cunning. Each time he sent a representative into the camps of his enemies for the peace negotiations, he gained some intelligence about their layout. Before long, he had a complete picture of the camps and the components thereof, most of which were constructed hastily from wood and thatching. When the spring of 203 BCE began, Scipio finally struck. A sneak attack by night was organized, during which the Romans blocked the entrances and exits to the enemy camps. Then, when escape had become largely impossible, the wooden buildings were torched. The camps went up in flames as the Carthaginians and Numidians struggled in vain to organize themselves and escape. Far

too few escaped to engage the Roman armies, and Scipio had won a massive victory with practically no casualties of his own.

Not long after the Battle of Utica, another Carthaginian force, augmented with native Iberian mercenaries, was formed in another attempt to stop Scipio Africanus. Hasdrubal and Syphax once again commanded this force, which was probably only about the same size as the Roman army, unlike the much larger force that had been burnt alive in its camps at Utica. The next battle, which took place not far from Utica, would come to be known as the Battle of the Great Plains. Once again, Scipio completely destroyed the enemy army, scattering most of its cavalry with his own before closing in to deal a decisive blow with the superior Roman infantry. With this last line of defense gone, Carthage was now as vulnerable as it had been since the time of the invasion of Regulus.

The destruction of the armies at Utica and the Battle of the Great Plains prompted Carthage to recall Hannibal from Italy, where he had long since lost the momentum in the war with Rome. Later in the same year, the Carthaginian general who had thwarted Rome at every turn during his decade and a half in Italy arrived back in north Africa, restoring Carthaginian confidence in the continuation of the war. In October of 202 BCE, Scipio and Hannibal met in what both likely knew would be the last great battle of the Second Punic War. If Hannibal won, Rome's capacity and will to field armies could diminish enough to make a tense peace inevitable. If Scipio won, Carthage's last

great army, led by a commander who had achieved semi-legendary status for his numerous victories at the expense of Rome, would be destroyed, leaving Carthage unable to continue the war. This battle would be the famous Battle of Zama.

This battle took place on an open plain known as Zama Regia, in modern-day Tunisia. The armies were of roughly equal size, with Hannibal fielding a combined force of 40,000 men and Scipio bringing 35,000 Roman soldiers. The location of the open plain was suggested by Hannibal, who still retained a significant force of seasoned and battle-hardened Numidian cavalry from his campaigns in Italy that would be best applied in an open battle. Scipio, too, fielded Numidians under their new king Masinissa. With Roman support, Masinissa had succeeded in carving out a kingdom for himself in Numidia, and had been aiding the Roman army under Scipio since its arrival in north Africa, though much Numidian support still trended toward Carthage.

As was standard practice, both generals deployed their cavalry units to their flanks, keeping the strongest infantry support in the center. In his center, Hannibal also kept his force of war elephants, hoping to use them to apply pressure to his enemy's center lines. These elephants were the first units deployed, along with light skirmishing troops meant more to harass and disorganize the Roman lines than to do real damage. The elephants, however, had been used to devastating effect against Roman armies in the past, and Hannibal probably

planned to break the Roman center with an elephant charge before committing his center infantry to exploit the openings while using cavalry to keep the Roman flanks occupied. However, Scipio, a commander easily on par with Hannibal, had already foreseen this tactic and had taken measures to mitigate the damage. Possibly drawing on knowledge of a very similar tactic used by Alexander the Great at Gaugamela to deal with Persian chariots, Scipio created gaps within his own lines covered only with light, mobile troops, through which the elephants could pass without inflicting substantial damage. This tactic was combined with the blowing of loud horns when the elephants began to stampede toward the Roman line, which frightened several of the animals enough to send them into retreat back into the Carthaginian line, inflicting damage on Hannibal's army with his own war elephants. The elephants that did not turn back charged through the openings in the Roman line, doing little damage. With a relatively simple plan, Scipio had gained the advantage by rendering Hannibal's opening moves almost completely useless.

As the elephant charge was being turned, Scipio's flanking cavalry units moved in to take advantage of the chaos, engaging with the Carthaginian cavalry units that protected Hannibal's flanks. Unlike at previous battles, Scipio held the numerical advantage in cavalry units at Zama, robbing an advantage that Hannibal had often relied on to achieve his incredible victories in Italy. The Carthaginian and allied Numidian cavalry were pressured into full retreat, leaving the infantry-heavy center of Hannibal's army the only thing standing



between the legendary Carthaginian commander and full defeat. Now, Scipio quickly began an infantry advance, probably reasoning that the only way to defeat Hannibal was to keep his attacks rapidly ongoing so as to keep his opponent from reestablishing order in his ranks. However, with the rapid succession of attacks, Scipio was able to apply enough pressure to the Carthaginian center to disperse two lines of Hannibal's three line deep force. Now, the Roman commander could close in for the kill.

Scipio's army formed up into a single line for a full frontal assault on the badly damaged Carthaginian army. Though Hannibal was close to defeat, he still retained control of his forces, pursuing a defensive strategy against the Roman force attacking him from the front. However, with his cavalry routed, Hannibal's rear was left exposed to the Roman cavalry that was still present after the clash between the cavalry forces of the two armies. The cavalry forces of Scipio's army swung around to attack the back of Hannibal's line, creating a killing zone in which the Carthaginians were pressed between the heavy Roman infantry in the front and a cavalry force behind. The Battle of Zama ended in a massacre the likes of which Hannibal had never before experienced under his command, with as many as 20,000 being killed and most of the rest of his army being taken as prisoners of war. Scipio Africanus had, at long last, dealt a decisive defeat to Carthage's greatest commander, and in so doing had put an end to the Second Punic War.

In the aftermath of the war, Rome emerged as the sole great power in the western Mediterranean. The treaty terms were so severe that Carthage was effectively reduced to the status of a Roman client state, agreeing to never raise a military force without permission from the Senate and to disband almost the entirety of its navy. A financial punishment was also imposed that all but bankrupted Carthage, leaving it a shell of its own former glory. With the diminishment of Carthage, Rome took control of the territory called Hispania, the formerly Carthaginian holdings in the southern and central parts of Iberia. In less than a century since the beginning of the Pyrrhic War, Rome had grown from simply controlling Italy into the undisputed master of the western Mediterranean basin. Roman expansion, however, was far from over, and a plethora of new holdings would become open to Rome as the second century BCE began.

## Section Four

# Eastward Expansion Into Macedon and Greece

Rome had already had its share of difficulties with Macedon, beginning when the king of Macedon in the time of Pyrrhus had decided to support the king of Epirus in his Italian campaign. With the

Macedonian involvement in the Second Punic War and concurrent First Macedonian War, however, the conflict between the two powerful states had become much more open and pronounced. With the defeat of Carthage and Rome's rapid ascent to power, the Roman Republic was free to turn its sights eastward, where its next set of major conflicts, the later Macedonian Wars, would take place.

### ***Second Macedonian War***

The Second Macedonian War would not actually break out until 200 BCE, but had its roots in events taking place toward the end of the Second Punic War. As Rome had been busily engaged in engineering the defeat of Carthage in Iberia and then in north Africa, the king of Egypt, Ptolemy IV, died, leaving control of Egypt to his son Ptolemy V, who was only five years old at the time (Egypt having had a long tradition of allowing children to rule with regents in order to maintain royal lineages faithfully). In the east, the an empire known as the Seleucid Empire, one of the many successor states to the former Achaemenid Persian Empire, controlled areas from modern Afghanistan and Pakistan in the east through Mesopotamia and into Syria and southern Turkey. This empire, at this point in its history, was in a resurgent phase, having suffered a period of contraction during the mid third century BCE that it had recently come out of. In Macedon, Philip V still ruled, and wished to acquire new territories of his own. Between these two expansionist states, a deal was made to seize Egyptian holdings in far western Asia. These actions drew ire

and concern from several Greek cities in Asia Minor, where there had been substantial Greek presence for centuries. Chief among the cities that had grown worried about being trapped between an expansionist Seleucid Empire and an expansionist Macedon were Pergamon and the island city of Rhodes, which appealed to Rome for assistance.

To determine whether and to what degree Rome should take part in the war, the Senate dispatched representatives to a conference with the relevant Greek cities in Athens, which had to that point been neutral in the conflicts. While the Roman representatives were in Athens, however, the Athenians made the decision to fight Macedon, prompting Philip V to send a military force southward toward the city. However, Rome stepped in, deciding to cast its lot in with the city-states that stood against Macedon and the Seleucids, possibly because of the past enmity between Rome and Macedon. Athens, as well as the states of the central Greek Aetolian League, were added to the agreement then made between Rome, Pergamon and Rhodes. Now, all of the states party to that agreement were allies of Rome and thus benefited from Roman protection from the Macedonians.

Predictably, Philip did not quietly accept this agreement, and thus continued his attacks on Greece, bringing him into a full war with Rome by proxy. For two years, Rome fought a series of limited and not particularly successful engagements against Philip in hopes of limiting his ability to project military power into southern and central Greece. It swiftly became apparent, however, that a more aggressive

approach was needed, as simply holding Philip at bay would not achieve lasting autonomy for the states now allied to Rome. In 198 BCE, a consul was elected who would champion that more aggressive approach, Titus Flamininus. Flamininus campaigned extensively against Macedonian troops in central Greece, bringing in several allies to Rome in the fight against Philip.

The next year, a final battle would be fought between the forces under Flamininus and a Macedonian army commanded by Philip in the central Greek region of Thessaly, in a hill range called the Cynoscephalae hills. There, a force of about 24,500 Romans with allied forces from various Greek city-states met Philip, who was in command of about 27,000 troops of his own. At first, the battle seemed to be going well for the Macedonians. However, a clever flanking maneuver ordered by Flamininus shortly brought broke the momentum of the Macedonians in battle, eventually resulting in a complete Roman victory and the slaughter of some 8,000 of Philip's soldiers.

By the next year, peace talks were already underway. Philip, the king of a large and powerful nation, could doubtlessly have continued the war. However, it seems probable that the decision to abandon the enterprise was one born of weighing the potential territorial gains in Greece against the cost of fighting an all-out war with Rome, by this time the military heavyweight of the Mediterranean. In 196 BCE, Philip agreed to treaty terms set forth by the Senate in which he

would disband the bulk of his naval force (the observant reader will notice that this was a condition applied in more than one treaty to limit the ability of Roman enemies to mobilize troops in the future) and abandon the territorial claims he had made in Greece and the Balkan region of Illyria, as well as pay a nominal fee to Rome. With the treaty accepted, the Second Macedonian War ended.

The legacy of this war on its own would be quite minor, as the conflict never escalated to the level of the two preceding Punic Wars. It did, however, greatly increase Rome's role in the eastern Mediterranean. By injecting itself into the framework of Greek political and military matters, the Roman Republic had taken a step that would eventually lead it to push farther and farther east and eventually to even incorporate Greece itself into its growing empire.

### ***War of Antiochus***

Though Rome had ended its war against Philip officially in 196 BCE, Roman military forces remained in allied parts of Greece in order to ensure that the treaty terms would be obeyed by the Macedonian king. During this time, though Macedon adhered to its agreement with Rome, the Seleucid Empire in the east was still pushing forward with its plan of expanding its territories. At this time, the empire was under the rule of Antiochus III, also known as Antiochus the Great, an extremely capable political and military leader who favored diplomatic maneuvering as a means to advance his imperial goals.

True to this form, Antiochus found several city-states, not the least of which was the now greatly diminished Sparta, that were opposed to the continued Roman presence in Greece after the end of the Second Macedonian War. Ensured that he would have support from the states that were not amiable to Roman interference in Greece, Antiochus put together a fairly small but still substantial military force and marched it westward from his own lands and into Greece in 191 BCE.



*Illustration 15: Bust of Antiochus the Great*

Rome, once again challenged over the Greek city-states, quickly mobilized an army under the command of one of the consuls for 191, Marcus Acilius Glabrio. Glabrio marched to Thessaly and there managed to expel Antiochus. Macedon, too, had now come into the war. However, in an unlikely turn of events, Philip V decided to



support Rome against Antiochus, possibly fearing that his own territorial holdings might be endangered by the Seleucid emperor's war in Greece. Antiochus, now pressed from all sides and waiting on reinforcements from Asia, decided to establish himself in a strong defensive position and wait for more troops to arrive to continue his operations. Drawing on a tactic of old in Greece, the Seleucid ruler brought his army to the most famous and best geographic defensive choke point in all of Greece: the pass at Thermopylae.

Thermopylae had already seen massed defensive actions of this sort several times before. The first time was the famous Battle of Thermopylae, in which Leonidas of Sparta had held off the armies of Xerxes the Great with a vastly smaller force of Spartans in 480 BCE. In another prominent incident at the pass, a force of Gauls moving south had been intercepted by Greeks trying to stop their advance. Now, two forces from completely outside of Greece, the Romans and the Seleucids, would do battle in the narrow corridor formed by the pass. Antiochus drew on the lessons of previous battles by building a strong defensive wall and dispatching a force of Aetolian allies to guard a road that ran above the pass, the route that Xerxes had finally used to encircle the Greeks in the battle of 480 BCE. However, the preparations were not enough. While Glabrio fought to keep Antiochus himself occupied in the nearly unbreachable pass, a Roman force commanded by two of Glabrio's tribunes took the high road around the pass and attacked the Aetolians there, eventually driving them off. Much as Xerxes had done almost three centuries earlier, the

Romans managed to swing around behind the Seleucid force and prevent any escape from the narrow passageway. 10,000 Seleucid soldiers were killed, while Antiochus himself ran from the battlefield with his cavalry just before the gap was closed by the encircling Roman force. Accounts from Roman historians suggest that only 200 Roman soldiers died in the battle, but this is fairly unlikely given the known conditions of other battles at Thermopylae for attackers. The Roman casualties were probably quite low in comparison to the Seleucid deaths, but were still likely higher than reported.

The War of Antiochus would continue in 190 BCE, after the emperor had returned to Asia. The war in that year opened with two naval battles, those of Eurymedon and Myonessus. At Eurymedon, a fleet from Rhodes defeated the Seleucid navy, but failed to destroy it. A more decisive naval victory was achieved at Myonessus, where a combined fleet from Rome and Rhodes again engaged the Seleucid navy, dealing it heavier losses. It is interesting to note that at these two battles, an old military enemy of Rome made his last appearances in battle against the Roman Republic he had once fought so successfully against. Hannibal Barca, the general who had invaded Italy through the Alps and harassed Rome in its own territory for 15 years, had been exiled from Carthage at the command of Rome because of a perception that Carthage was gradually recovering from the Second Punic War. If Carthage did field an army again, the Romans did not want to see Hannibal, a commander they had much difficulty defeating, leading it. Leaving his home, Hannibal had

ventured east, eventually being welcomed as a military adviser in the court of Antiochus, after which he was placed in command of the fleet. However, Hannibal's command abilities were best suited to pitched battles on land, and the fleet he was given was insufficient to best Rome or Rhodes, resulting in his two final defeats before he retired from military life for good.

In order to secure victory in the war, however, it was still necessary to win a major land battle. This battle would come in the autumn of 190 BCE, when Roman forces that had crossed into Asia in pursuit of Antiochus met his army at the Battle of Magnesia, near the western coast of modern-day Turkey. The Roman force was accompanied by allies from the city of Pergamon and was officially under the command of the then-consul Lucius Cornelius Scipio (better known as Scipio Asiaticus), who was the brother of Scipio Africanus. The more famous Scipio had been sent with his brother as a *legatus*, or a field general under the command of the consul. However, modern scholars have suggested that it was Scipio Africanus who was truly in command of the army, albeit wielding it indirectly through his brother because he was not at the time eligible to command a consular army.

The numbers of troops present at Magnesia pose a problem for some modern scholars, as ancient sources have the Romans outnumbered more than two to one with 30,000 men to Antiochus' 70,000. Given that the incursion into Asia was a foreign campaign far from Roman supply lines and potential reinforcements, it seems unusual that the

brothers Scipio would have engaged such a numerically superior army. Thus, a revised view of the battle in which the numbers were at least somewhat closer (how much is impossible to say beyond speculation) has become prevalent among the scholarly community. Whatever the case, Magnesia, after an early lead held by the Seleucid army, turned into a decisive Roman victory when a major cavalry charge, the use of chariots and even an assault with war elephants open up substantial gaps in the lines of Antiochus, leaving him vulnerable on the flanks and disorganized throughout his entire formation.

The War of Antiochus was ended officially two years after with the imposition of the Treaty of Apamea. As with other treaties engineered by Rome, the peace with the Seleucid Empire dealt a devastating blow to the enemies of the Republic by forcing Antiochus to decommission his navy, turn all of his war elephants over to Roman forces and give up huge tracts of land in Asia, which were divided between the now decidedly pro-Roman cities of Rhodes and Pergamon. With this, Rome gained a very great degree of influence in the eastern part of the Mediterranean basin, as it was now allied not only with several city-states in Greece itself but also with the two cities that now held large parts of western Turkey.

### ***Third Macedonian War***

Following the end of the War of Antiochus, there was a period of

relative stability in the eastern Mediterranean during which Rome exercised substantial power through proxy via its allies in the region. That would begin to change, however, when Philip V of Macedon finally passed from the scene in 179 BCE, leaving his son, Perseus, as the king of Macedon. Unlike his father, Perseus had not directly learned the costs of tampering with the Roman Republic's allies. For the next several years, the young king rallied his armies and prepared to once again pursue a policy of territorial acquisition in Greece and the surrounding areas. Eventually, this prompted Roman-allied cities, especially Pergamon, to appeal to the Republic for assistance and protection.



*Illustration 16: Coin depicting Perseus of Macedon*

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By 171 BCE, events had progressed to the point that the Romans were preparing for yet another war with Macedon. Perseus had already mobilized his troops, invading Thessaly and seizing control of several of the towns and cities there. A Roman army commanded by the consul Publius Licinius Crassus then moved into Thessaly in order to confront Perseus and drive the Macedonians back into their own territory. At the ensuing Battle of Callicinus, Perseus managed to score a minor victory against Rome, inflicting heavy damages on the consular army and forcing it to withdraw to another position nearby. Perseus, apparently not wishing to draw Rome into a full war, offered peace after having allowed the Roman army to withdraw and not pressing the offensive. The new Macedonian king even offered to pay the Republic practically any reasonable fine for the war in order to end it quickly. Publius Licinius Crassus, however, was among the Romans who took a very hard line on terms of peace, and rejected any offer, unless it would come along with the stipulation that Perseus surrender himself into Roman hands, effectively giving Rome complete power over Macedon. For obvious reasons, Perseus refused the counter-offer.

As winter arrived, Perseus secured the gains that he had made and then personally returned to Macedon with much of his army, while the Roman army remained in Greece. However, the actions of Crassus began to turn sentiment against Rome, as he had fallen to effectively looting cities for additional supplies for the army. This led to increased resistance to Rome, rendering the campaigning year of 170

BCE a constant back and forth between Rome and Macedon in which each courted the other's allies, with Macedon generally being more successful in securing more support to itself. By 169 BCE, many of Rome's allies in Greece and Turkey were urging peace because of the increasingly unstable political situation that was developing as the Aegean and its cities were one by one divided between Macedonian and Roman support. However, the Romans were not prepared to accept peace until they had secured a victory that would allow them to dictate their own terms. That victory would at last come in 168 BCE, at the Battle of Pydna.

In the summer of 168, Perseus and his forces were camped on a broad plain near the city of Pydna, in Macedon itself. The Macedonians and the Romans had been maneuvering around each other's armies for some time, but the time had now come for the two forces to collide. A Roman force under the general Lucius Aemilius Paullus moved toward the Macedonian position hoping to score a decisive victory against Perseus after three years of inconclusive fighting. The Macedonian force outnumbered the Romans 44,000 to 29,000, a marked disadvantage, especially on open ground, which favored the Macedonian phalanx formation.

At the outset of the battle, Perseus ordered an advance into the Roman line. The Macedonians, making use of the superior defensive capabilities inherent to the phalanx, pushed into the Romans with spears and pikes forward while staying behind their front row of

heavy shields, inflicting damage on the Roman line while risking very little to themselves. However, Perseus, for unknown reasons, had failed to consider the ground on which his army was moving fully. As the advance continued, the Romans began to back into a string of low hills nearby. Though these hills would not have been enough to gain a strategic advantage by taking high ground and fighting from it, they were sufficient to break up the phalanx formation, which had to remain as a single solid line in order to maintain its full offensive and defensive effectiveness. As soon as the Romans had openings in the Macedonian line that they could attack, Perseus' army was doomed. More than 20,000 of the Macedonians were slaughtered or captured.

Following the devastating defeat of his armies, Perseus fled from the battlefield, accompanied by fast-moving cavalry units. At this point, the Third Macedonian War was effectively over, but the capture of the king of Macedon would make the Roman victory complete. Perseus would eventually flee to the Aegean island of Samothrace in an attempt to keep himself from being captured. However, even this was not enough to preserve his freedom. Following a failed attempt to leave Samothrace aboard a merchant vessel, Perseus was eventually handed over to the Romans, who brought him back to Rome in chains as part of a triumphal ceremony granted to Paullus for his defeat of the Macedonians.

Following the Third Macedonian War, Rome gained effectively complete political control over Macedon and Illyria. Macedon was



carved up into four republics at the order of the Senate to prevent it from ever becoming a major power again. The anti-Roman factions in Greece were also punished harshly, with pro-Roman city-states being given favorable treatment. With the victory at Pydna and the destruction of Macedon as a cohesive state, Rome had established itself as the dominant power in the eastern Mediterranean, though it did not yet directly control Macedon and Greece.

At home, the Third Macedonian War also had a substantial impact on Roman economics. Up until this point, frequent Roman wars had called for special levies and taxes to be placed on the population of Rome itself in order to sustain the costly military activity. With the subjugation of Macedon, however, Rome saw a massive influx of treasure from its wealthy competitor state in the east. Thanks to the increases in the coffers of Rome after its adventure in the eastern Mediterranean, the citizens of the city were relieved of direct taxation to pay for military operations. Economic benefits such as these accruing from the many military victories of Rome in the second and third centuries BCE would ultimately drive a strong support for imperial policy among the common Roman people going forward.

### ***Solidification of Roman Power: The Fourth Macedonian, Third Punic and Achaean Wars***

As the 140s BCE began, Rome was at a high point of political, military and economic power. The establishment of its hegemonic

power throughout the Mediterranean had allowed it to achieve a position of political pre-eminence among its neighbors. However, the frequent Roman wars and the harshness with which it conducted peace treaties had also been the source of much resentment throughout the Mediterranean world. In the earliest years of the 140s BCE, this resentment would manifest in not one but two wars, each of which would bring about the conclusion of a long series of wars fought by Rome. These conflicts were the Fourth Macedonian and Third Punic Wars.

Macedon, though divided by Rome after its defeat in the Third Macedonian War, found itself engaged in war with Rome once more as a result of an anti-Roman uprising staged by a man named Andriscus, who claimed to be the son of Perseus. Practically all historical sources agree, however, that he was of no relation to Perseus and was little more than an opportunistic pretender who saw a remote chance of carving a kingdom for himself out of Macedon, provided he could seize it from under the powerful thumb of Rome. Relying on support from anti-Roman elements in Macedon, Greek city-states fed up with Roman intervention in their affairs and a Thracian army, Andriscus seized the throne of Macedon and became that state's final king.

At first, the new Macedonian king was able to repel preliminary attacks from Rome, further securing his position as a ruler by scoring minor victories against the hated external rule of Rome. Interestingly,

however, Macedon was not the only nation experiencing a resurgent phase after having been placed under Roman hegemonic rule. Beginning in the late 150s, Carthage, also, had begun to rebuild itself. For years, the north African city-state had been severely hindered by the payments demanded by Rome in the peace treaty that ended the Second Punic War. At last, however, those payments were completed, leaving Carthage free to once again begin growing instead of sending the bulk of its economic resources to Rome. Carthage had seen substantial decline since the Second Punic War, as it no longer had a firm control over its territories in north Africa thanks to a strong and independent Numidia, which was still an ally of Rome. In 151 BCE, a small border war had broken out between Carthage and Numidia, prompting anger and intervention from Rome against Carthage. Despite attempts on the part of the Carthaginian leadership to convince Rome to settle the matter peacefully, the Senate refused all offers made by Carthage. Today, many scholars believe that the border war with Numidia was simply a useful excuse to invade north Africa and formally conquer Carthage for financial and territorial gain. In 149 BCE, just as Andriscus was securing his power in Macedon, Rome declared a final war of Carthage, bringing it into the Third Punic War.

Unlike the previous Punic Wars, the Third Punic War would not take the course of a geographically large struggle between two Mediterranean superpowers. Instead, the last war between Carthage and Rome would be a horribly mismatched one in which Rome was

effectively assured of victory from the very beginning. Beginning in either 148 or 149 BCE, a large Roman army laid siege to the city, exploiting the fact that it could no longer call for reinforcements from the broad network of allies and client states it had once controlled. This army was commanded by two Roman military leaders named Manius Manilius and Scipio Aemilianus, neither of whom was a consul when the siege began (Aemilianus would be made consul in 147 BCE, before the multi-year siege was concluded). This unusually long siege would constitute almost the entirety of military activity in the Third Punic War.

In 148 BCE, new developments would begin to emerge in Macedon, where Andriscus had succeeded in pushing back Rome's early military campaigns to remove him. A renewed effort was led by the general Quintus Caecilius Metellus, who engaged and defeated Andriscus at the Second Battle of Pydna. With that victory, Rome put down the uprising in Macedon, rendering it once more subservient. However, the arrangement of a divided Macedon existing under heavy Roman influence would not be renewed. This time, Rome would go a step further in dealing with its enemy to the east by officially turning Macedon into a Roman province. Now, a key part of the eastern Mediterranean was not only under Roman influence, but was in fact under direct Roman rule.

In Carthage, the siege continued. The city had dedicated all of its resources to fighting off the Roman siege, even going so far as to

effectively gear all economic activity that took place within Carthage toward the war effort. Arms, armor and war machines were produced constantly in order to keep the Carthaginian defenders supplied. Despite the tremendous effort, however, it was becoming increasingly clear that Carthage could not win this war. Though the conclusion was foregone, the city fought on, determined not to lose to the enemy it had fought for so long.

In early 146 BCE, the siege at Carthage would finally be broken when the Roman army breached the walls of the city and was finally able to engage its enemies directly. Even though Carthage had been under siege for more than two years, the battle that ensued was not an easy one. The citizens of the city, given ample time to prepare, had been able to arm themselves heavily and fought the Roman army throughout the city even after the outer defenses had been breached. Though the Roman army had to endure difficult fighting, the city was finally taken, forever ending Carthaginian autonomy. The city was destroyed as a result, and Utica became the primary urban center of north Africa. With this, the northern parts of Africa and all other areas that had formerly been within the Carthaginian sphere of influence were incorporated into Rome's growing empire.



*Illustration 17: Parts of the ruins of Carthage, which was destroyed following the Third Punic War*

Within the Mediterranean, Rome now held dominance over both east and west. Only in some parts of Greece was there still substantial opposition to Roman rule. That too, however, was soon to be put to rest. In 146, just as the Third Punic War was reaching its conclusion, another war would begin that would pit Rome against the Achaean League of southern Greece. This war is usually referred to simply as the Achaean War.

The Achaean League was a powerful confederation of city-states situated on the Peloponnesian Peninsula, geographically near to Sparta. Indeed, it was in the relations of the League with Sparta that the roots of the Achaean War lay. Sparta, as we have previously noted, was long past its prime by the time the Romans expanded their power into the Aegean. However, the city still wielded a great degree of influence within southern Greece, a fact partially owing to the glories of its past. Sparta and the Achaean League in the mid second century BCE existed in a delicate balance. Sparta, which had consistently opposed Roman power in Greece, found itself strongly at odds with several members of the Achaean League, which as a general rule had been a supported of Rome up to that point. Sparta's influence in southern Greece, however, was not to be underestimated. In 146, at the prompting of Sparta and with the support of several member states that had grown wary of the ever-increasing presence of Roman political and military power in the Greek world, the Achaean League decided that it would go to war with Rome.

Historically, the Achaean War is often treated as little more than a footnote in the overall history of Rome. However, this conflict had broad implications for both Rome and the ancient city-states of Greece. Doubtless, this popular perception of the Achaean War as a fairly minor event is not aided by the fact that it lasted for only one year (146 BCE) and contained only two known major battles. The first of these was a conflict between a Roman army under Metellus and a Greek confederate army led by a general named Critolaos. This battle,

known as the Battle of Scarpheia, was a disaster for the Achaean league. The army under Critolaos, a general who had decided against a peaceful end to the war and instead had chosen to go forward without negotiations with Rome, was defeated. The Achaeans, following Scarpheia, would almost certainly have been aware that there was no clear path to victory for them in a war with Rome. Nevertheless, the war went on, until the Battle of Corinth later in the same year.

A new army was raised to deal with the Romans, this time under the command of a general named Diaeus. This army was opposed by the Roman general Lucius Mummius, who commanded a numerically superior force of Roman legionnaires. The end of Greek autonomy was now on the horizon, but a final Roman victory would be needed to cement the rule of Rome over the Greek city-states. This victory would occur just to the north of Corinth, once one of the most powerful cities in all of Greece. When the two armies camped near each other, the Greeks, still hoping to achieve whatever victory may have been possible, staged a nocturnal raid on the Roman camp, inflicting some damage, but probably not enough to make a significant difference

The next day, the Battle of Corinth began in earnest. The Greek infantry, still a force to be reckoned with even when outnumbered, fought well enough to hold the Roman line for some time. However, the Romans had come to the battle with a cavalry force that outnumbered the Greek horsemen by a factor of more than five to



one. As a result, the Greek cavalry was quickly routed from the field, unable to compete in any meaningful way with the onslaught of Roman cavalry. This left the Greek infantry alone on the field and vulnerable to cavalry attack. However, the Greek line held until a unit of Roman shock troops made a full-on charge at the Greek line with the sole intention of opening up a hole in the formation that the rest of the Roman legions could then exploit. The effort was successful, and the Greek line began to break. Once this had happened, the outcome of the battle had been decided.

In the aftermath of the battle, the ancient city of Corinth was almost completely destroyed. The armies of the Achaean League had been bested, and Roman control over Greece became an irrevocable state of affairs. The Achaean League and its principle anti-Roman member state, Sparta, were now incorporated into the expanding Roman world. With this single victory, the Romans achieved almost total rule over Greece, the source from which Roman culture had taken so much of its influence in the past. Now, with the ending of the Achaean War, the eastern and western Mediterranean were truly brought together under the banner of Rome. From the Iberian Peninsula to the Aegean Sea, a massive portion of the known world now fell under the dominion of a single city in Italy. Rome, in the recognizable form of an ancient imperial superpower as we popularly know it today, had truly begun to exist.

## Section Five

# Political Changes in the Later Second Century BCE

The Roman Republic, now approaching 400 years old, had succeeded not only in preventing the accumulation of power in a single monarchical individual as it had set out to do, but had also taken Rome from a single (albeit powerful) state within the Latin League, expanded its power to encompass most of Italy and even projected that power farther outward throughout the bulk of the Mediterranean world. In the time since the ending of the Roman Monarchy, the divides between the Patrician and Plebian classes had been lowered considerably, Rome's economy had been grown into a thriving and booming machine of trade and commerce, and a general stability within the city itself had been maintained under most circumstances. Now, however, a series of changes would occur that would begin the process of decline in the Republic. These changes would define most of the second half of the second century BCE, and would ultimately lead slowly to the end of the Roman Republic.

The beginning of this long and complex chain of events is generally traced to the attempted reforms of two brothers, Gaius and Tiberius

Gracchus. These two brothers occupied a nearly unique middle ground between the Plebian and Patrician classes, having been members of a family that had branches in both classes. This gave the brothers a degree of standing rare among the Plebians, allowing them to skyrocket into high political positions. Tiberius Gracchus came to occupy the office of Plebian tribune in 133 BCE, an office that he would use to begin pushing for a massive program of economic reforms.



*Illustration 18: Statue of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus*

Although the political divide between the upper and lower classes of Roman society was no longer as great as it had been during the earliest years of the Republic (largely thanks to the early reforms we have already discussed), there was still a sharp economic divide between the fortunes of those classes. This economic disparity had grown more and more pronounced as the empire centered in Rome

grew and became wealthier. In earlier years, simplicity had been considered a key Roman virtue. As the empire grew, however, the nobility had fallen more and more into the habit of pursuing luxury for its own sake. This development was not only disliked by the Plebian class, but also by some Roman traditionalists among the nobility. Among the most outspoken critics of the increasing decadence of Rome had been Cato the Elder, a prominent statesman who had made adherence to more traditional values a staple of his long political career spanning the first half of the second century BCE.

By the time that Tiberius Gracchus took office, the economic situation in Rome had degenerated to the point that unemployment was rampant. The aristocracy had, in many cases, effectively grabbed off rented public lands and removed peasants from their own small farms thereon, thus adding the public lands to their own private land holdings. The peasants were then denied employment on the estates of the aristocracy because of the growing number of slaves present in Rome from the various imperial expansions. Gracchus perceived this both as an economic and a military problem. The latter would have not been the case but for an archaic requirement of Roman military service stating that a Roman soldier had to be an owner of at least some amount of land. If the situation continued, Gracchus reasoned, the peasantry would fail to produce anything economically, while the number of Roman males eligible for military service would progressively decline. Thus, Tiberius Gracchus set about a plan of dividing land up more evenly within Roman society.

Gracchus' plan was fairly simple, as a law had already existed in Rome from long before limiting the amount of publicly owned land that might be occupied and worked by any one person. Though still technically in force, the law had been unenforced for so long that it carried no legal weight, and most of the nobility occupied vastly more land than they were allowed in the strictest application of Roman law. Gracchus, therefore, introduced legislation that would redistribute land within the legal limits. As a means of compensating those who were already far over those limits, his legislation made provision for granting the lands that they retained to them without taxes or rent while also offering monetary compensation for anything that had been invested in the lost land by the previous occupant. The peasants who were reinstalled on the land left over would then have to pay a small rent on their lands. Under the proposal, private property held by the nobility would remain unaffected.

When this piece of legislation was considered in the Senate, it was roundly rejected, as many Senators stood to lose by its enactment. However, Tiberius Gracchus still had some authority to enact his plan, even without the approval of the Senate. Though the Senate wielded more power as a rule, the laws passed by the Plebian Assembly were still binding. Thus, when Gracchus was able to convince that body to vote his proposal into law, the effects of it became binding even against the will of the Senate. Gracchus began to redistribute lands according to the long-defunct Roman land laws, drawing the ire of

practically every member of the nobility.

The plans of the nobility to sideline Gracchus thus far had failed, including one attempt to challenge his voice among the Plebians with that of another Plebian tribune for the year, named Octavius. With the beginnings of redistribution occurring, however, harsher methods were now called for. The aristocracy openly planned to prosecute Gracchus once his term as tribune was up. Even if they could not defeat him there, such an action would almost certainly have ceased the continued seizure of land, as the same fate would certainly await any future Plebian leader who attempted to continue the policies implemented by Gracchus. The controversial figure was thus left with only one choice: to seek a second consecutive term.

In a final effort to secure re-election by promising even more to the commoners, Tiberius Gracchus proposed that the wealth of Pergamon, which had recently been willed directly to Rome by its aging king, would be used to fund the farms of the peasantry as land was appropriated to them from his redistribution. At the event where his election was to be decided, the opposition to Gracchus staged an attack, with several armed men sent to kill the Plebian tribune and prevent him from further dividing the common people and the nobles. Supporters of Gracchus blocked the advance of his assailants while he was informed of the attack. Allegedly, Gracchus, attempting to signal to the crowd that he was in danger, made a gesture toward his head. His opponents, however, used this as an excuse to return to the Senate

and report that Gracchus had called upon the people to make him their king (the gesture toward the head being reported as a request for a crown).

In the ensuing confusion, several members of the Senate and their supporters stormed Capitoline Hill, the Roman hill where the event was taking place, and murdered Tiberius Gracchus. The Senate, after a period of instability, regained general control of Rome after his death. However, the deeper tensions that had produced the support for the prominent redistribution advocate were still very much present within Rome. A decade later, the same tensions would be addressed by another Gracchus, Gaius.

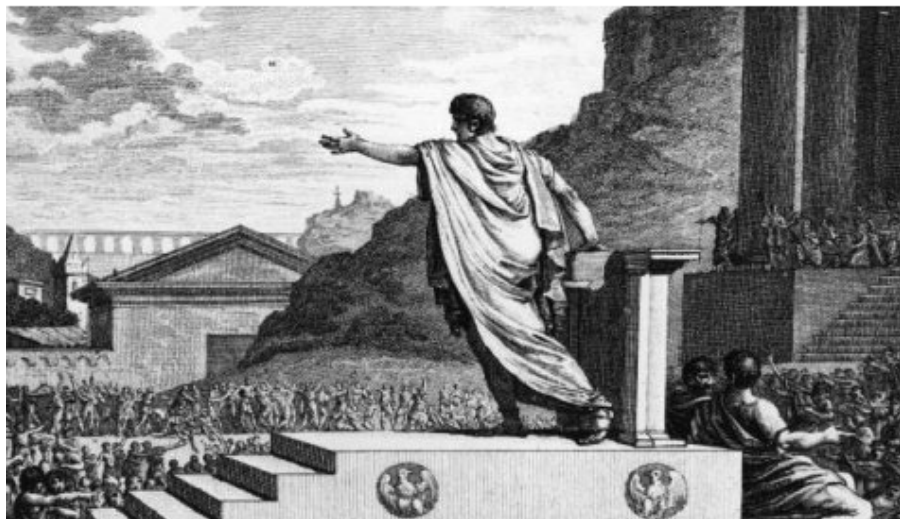
During the term of Tiberius Gracchus, his brother Gaius had been a part of his efforts to redistribute land from the aristocracy to the commoners. In 123 BCE, the younger Gracchus also became a Plebian tribune. Much like his older brother, Gaius was determined to carry favor with the Plebians by proposing policies that would favor them over the more economically powerful nobles. Not only were the nobles now faced with another economically populist movement, but that movement would now be led by a figure with a personal hatred for the nobility and the Senate because of the death of his older brother ten years before.

Gaius Gracchus knew before he was even elected that the Senate would oppose him at every turn, especially since his proposals were

far more extreme than those of Tiberius Gracchus. In order for him to achieve his ends, it would be necessary for him to secure almost universal and unwavering support among the common people. To do this, Gracchus began by establishing a system of grain storage facilities in Rome where commoners could purchase a daily allotment of grain for half of what they would pay for it on the open market. The measure, combined with a program of championing Rome's first large network of roads into outlying areas (a contribution that would have very real value as the empire grew), would increase his popularity and give him an audience to which he could pitch his vision for a nearly complete overhaul of the traditional Roman system.

Gracchus planned a huge expansion on his older brother's idea of redistributing land near Rome. His plan called for the establishment of colonies in places throughout Italy, Sicily, and even in the former territory of Carthage. In these colonies, common people would be able to claim land easily and create new economically productive cities of their own. Increased subsidies for grain, beyond those that Gracchus had already provided, were also discussed as part of his plan for the future of Rome.





*Illustration 19: Sketch of Gaius Gracchus, shown addressing the people of Rome*

On the political front, Gaius Gracchus planned to effectively cripple the institutions that had ruled Rome for centuries. In the Senate, for example, Gracchus proposed an expansion of three times the previous membership from 300 to 900. This influx of senators (whose selection Gracchus would have, with little doubt, controlled indirectly) would have flooded the body with those sympathetic to Gracchus, rendering it incapable of opposing him. Though less punitive, restrictions were proposed for the courts that would have severely limited the power of judges in the city. At every turn, the commoners supported the younger brother of their former champion for his hard line stances against the elites of Roman society.

The next year, Gaius Gracchus was granted a second term as Plebian tribune, with the ardent support of most of the Plebian class. Entering

his second term, Gracchus wielded a degree of influence that the very system of the Roman Republic had been engineered to prevent being invested in any one person. With this power established, Gracchus turned his mind to the broader empire. Among his more moderate proposals was a piece of legislation that would have extended many of the rights of citizenship to those living in other areas of Italy. This plan, however, found less support among the common people, as it did not directly benefit them and would reduce their status over those living outside of Rome.

During his attempt at a third term, Gracchus found himself incapable of securing the support that he had once commanded among the common people. Partially, this was the result of a plan the Senate had enacted in which Gracchus' fellow Plebian tribune Marcus Livius Drusus had made promises to the poor vastly outweighing those of even Gaius Gracchus, giving the commoners a new (albeit entirely false) champion to rally behind. His support may also have waned because of slow progress on the creation of a colony at the former site of Carthage, as well as a consistent favoring of the extremely poor in Rome over the comparatively wealthy and influential upper members of the Plebian class (of which Gaius Gracchus was, himself, very much one). In the end, Gracchus was denied a third term, and the protection he had enjoyed as a Plebian tribune was gone.

Once Gracchus was out of office, the Senate took decisive action against what it perceived as his attempt to set himself up as a king-

like figure. Gracchus, in response, staged a protest within the city of Rome itself, drawing the anger of the Senate and persuading it that he intended to disobey Roman law by using the numbers of his supporters that were currently present there to effectively retain his power by force. Another Plebian tribune, Lucius Opimius, was invested with the authority to contain the protests by force by a decree of the Senate. Fighting broke out between the senators accompanying Opimius and the supporters of Gracchus, and soon spiraled out of control into a massive riot in which many were killed. Gracchus himself retreated and eventually committed assisted suicide to prevent his enemies from laying hands on him. Though the time of the Gracchi was now over, the wounds left by the events surrounding them would plague Rome for decades to come.

Some have portrayed the brothers Gracchus as selfless reformers who fell victim to a corrupt class of Roman elites, while others have seen them as opportunistic power-grabbers who seized on an already existing sense of populist rage within Rome. A more balanced view, however, may be presented in which the Gracchi represented a deeper sense of opposition to a Rome that was rapidly becoming more and more decadent at the cost of many of its citizens. In the years that followed the Second Punic War, the sheer power and wealth of Rome had propelled it away from its more traditional values, a phenomenon despised as much by conservative nobles as by the commoners (though for very different sets of reasons). Thus, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus may, to a certain extent, be seen as symbolic of the overall

public reaction to trends within the leadership of the Republic.

Throughout the 120s and 110s BCE, Rome fought a series of little-known wars, mostly in areas it already controlled. In north Africa, for example, a war between Rome and Numidia, known as the Jugurthine War, tightened Roman control over Numidia, formerly a fairly autonomous ally that helped to keep balance in north Africa after the fall of Carthage. In Europe, a major threat arose in the form of migrating Germanic tribes who migrated south into territory held by Roman-allied Celtic tribes. This latter conflict, the Cimbrian War, would be the last great military conflict of the second century BCE for Rome.

Though shaken with internal political strife left over from the time of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, its military remained powerful. At first, it seemed that the Cimbri, as the Germanic groups moving south toward Roman territory were collectively known, were not perceived to truly pose a threat. As the war dragged on, however, it became clear that the tribes from the north were not as easy to deal with as the Romans had first supposed. Following the beginning of the war in 112 BCE, the Romans went on to a series of defeats. Particularly devastating was a defeat at the Battle of Noreia, somewhere in the eastern Alps, at which a Roman army was almost entirely destroyed by the Cimbri, leaving little between them and the Alpine routes into Italy itself. Because the Cimbri, like other migrating tribes the Romans would encounter in their history, moved as a massive population

(some estimates suggest as many as 300,000, counting noncombatants), it was virtually impossible for a Roman army to achieve victory through numbers.

By 109 BCE, the Cimbri had moved into what is today southern France. Here again, Rome failed to achieve a victory against the migrating peoples. Repeatedly over the course of the next four years, the Romans would be defeated by the Cimbri. Though not an immediate threat to Rome itself, the losses at the hands of the Germanic peoples would have been humiliating for the Romans, who typically considered the peoples of central and northern Europe as little more than barbarians. The threat level, however, would escalate dramatically following the events of 105 BCE.

After several years of fighting with the Cimbri unsuccessfully, it was determined that the northern force had to be put down once and for all. To this end, Rome fielded one of the largest armies in its history up to that point to move against the Cimbri and destroy them. This army, led by the consul Gnaeus Mallius Maximus, was to move north and rendezvous with another force under Quintus Servilius Caepio, a consul from the previous year whose command had been extended. Together, these two Roman commanders would fight the Cimbri at the Battle of Arausio with a combined force of some 80,000 soldiers. Despite this massive army, however, Arausio would come to be remembered as one of the greatest calamities in the history of the Roman Republic.

The plan to have two armies unite would, under other circumstances, have been a good one. However, military matters in ancient Rome often took on a very personal nature (especially, as in the case of the current and former consul, when a militarily powerful political office was involved). When Maximus and Caepio met, the result was anything but harmonious. Maximus, as consul, was the senior commander by Roman law. However, he had little field experience and was opposed consistently by Caepio (to the point that Caepio flagrantly disobeyed Maximus' orders with regards to the disposition of his troops). The extreme disorganization resulting from the clash of the commanders would give the Cimbri an advantage before the battle even began.

As the battle began, Caepio launched an ill-advised assault without orders from Maximus. Indeed, Maximus may have been preparing to call for negotiations with the enemy leaders. Thus, when Caepio led his own army against the Cimbri camp, he was completely unsupported by the troops under Maximus, who was not even aware of an assault until it was already in progress. In most pitched battles of the ancient world, it was the mark of a great commander to be able to divide the enemy forces and cut them down in smaller sections. At Arausio, however, the Roman commanders did this to themselves in one of the most bizarre and ironic military incidents of the ancient world. The Cimbri could not have found themselves in a better position to defeat the Romans with any amount of tactical

maneuvering. Caepio, in his premature charge, had handed victory to the northerners.

As one might predict, Caepio's force was handily defeated as it assaulted a defensive position occupied by a much larger army. Maximus, unable to retreat because he had anchored the rear of his camp against a river, was forced to fight the Cimbri on his own, again suffering defeat. The Roman force assembled for the sole purpose of destroying the Cimbri had, itself, been destroyed with comparatively little difficulty for the invaders. Arausio would come down in history as one of the greatest defeats ever suffered by Rome.

As has often happened in history, however, a great defeat provided a catalyst for change within Rome. This change would come in the person of a Roman statesman by the name of Gaius Marius. Marius was a prominent military leader who had been consul once before, in 107 BCE. During his consulship, Marius had put into place a system of military reforms collectively known as the Marian Reforms. Since Rome's earliest days, Roman soldiers had had to own land and to provide their own arms and armor. Under the Marian Reforms, these requirements were withdrawn, allowing the poorest citizens of Rome to enter military service. This led to a vast change in Rome over time (this change was beginning to be realized by the time of the Battle of Arausio, but would not fully manifest itself until the first century BCE). Until the Marian Reforms were put into place, all Roman armies had been composed of citizen soldiers. Some of these soldiers, through

multiple campaigns, became very skilled in the arts of war, but would return to their normal vocations in times of peace. With the Marian Reforms, however, a class of professional soldiers emerged, as a part of the reforms involved paying soldiers for their service. To many in Rome, this type of military employment became more remunerative than attempting to find work inside the city. The addition of a pension and an option to retire on land in conquered provinces ruled by Rome only further incentivized the development of this professional military class.

After Arausio, Rome once again needed the leadership of Marius, who was by then one of its most respected military and political figures. Marius was elected for his next term as consul without even first being recalled to Rome (he was in north Africa at the time of his election). At this time, the Cimbri had moved far to the east, entering the Iberian Peninsula, while the Teutones, an allied tribe that had fought beside them at Arausio, remained in what is today France. Marius began to assemble the forces he would need to end the Cimbrian War. However, one year would not be enough to do this. After being elected consul for 104 BCE, Marius would earn the distinction of serving five consecutive consular terms, something that, under ordinary circumstances, would have been impossible under Roman law.

The next phase of the Cimbrian War would come in 102 BCE, when the new army under Marius set out to defeat the Teutones while the



Cimbri remained in Iberia. This was handily achieved at the Battle of Aquae Sextiae, in modern southern France, where the 40,000 legionnaires under Marius utterly destroyed an army of 120,000 Teutones and captured the Teutone king, Teutobod, as a prisoner of war. The Teutones were entirely neutralized, leaving Marius in position to deal with the Cimbri directly.

By 102 BCE, the Cimbri had made their way back to the west from Iberia. Interestingly, the tribe managed to penetrate into Italy itself through the Alps, suddenly arriving as a threat to the Roman homeland itself. Marius' consular colleague, Quintus Lutatius Catulus, had been defending what is today called the Brenner Pass (one of the key passageways through the Alps in northern Italy), but had found himself forced to withdraw as the Cimbri arrived. The Cimbri decided to winter over in northern Italy, leaving a massive enemy force in the north with only the army of Catulus standing between it and Rome, as Marius was still in modern France.

In 101 BCE, Marius made his way back through Gaul and the Alps to come to the aid of Italy. The Cimbri had made little progress south, instead raiding the area around the Po River, south of which was the other Roman army under Catulus. That year, the two armies grouped together to defeat the Cimbrian army at the Battle of Vercellae. At this point, given the proximity of the Cimbri to Rome itself, a victory was absolutely essential for Marius.

At Vercellae, Marius positioned his forces so as to optimize the reflection of the sun from the polished Roman armor and shields toward the Cimbri, who were taken aback by the blinding light. This tactic, though a minor addition to the battle overall, gave the Romans a slight advantage while moving forward to attack their enemies. Apparently, this advantage was sufficient to turn the battle decidedly in favor of the Romans, who scored a massive victory over the Cimbri that neutralized them entirely as a military threat to Rome's territories. Marius, to an even greater extent than before, was perceived as a great military hero of Rome.



*Illustration 20: Painting depicting the aftermath of the slaughter of the Cimbri after Marius' victory*

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With the ending of the second century BCE, Rome was about to enter a very different phase of its history. The internal weaknesses that would eventually bring about the Republic's end had already been illustrated by the grievances played upon by the Gracchi. The reforms

instituted by Marius would also play an ironic role in the downfall of the Roman Republic. Though a military hero in his own time, the lasting effects of Marius' new military policies and the class of professional soldiers that they created would soon create a crisis in which generals, whose power had historically been limited by short terms, consular oversight and the traditions of the Roman citizen soldier, would soon gain a vastly increased degree of power within the context of Roman society.

The stage was now set for the end of Rome's republican system. However, that end would not come immediately. Instead, a series of events throughout the first century BCE would ultimately lead up to it, even as the military, political and economic power of Rome continued to grow.

## Section Six

# The First Century BCE: Sulla, Spartacus, the First Triumvirate and the Fall of the Republic

The same political strife that existed within Rome itself also existed

within the Italian lands controlled by Rome. Although the Italian peoples had been close allies to Rome for multiple centuries, they were not yet permitted Roman citizenship (although Gaius Gracchus had unsuccessfully suggested extending the rights of citizenship to them before his death). Much as the divide between the wealthy and poor in Rome had escalated tensions between the classes, the divide between citizens of Rome and non-citizens elsewhere within the empire led to friction between the Romans and some of their closest allies.

Beginning in 91 BCE, these tensions would manifest themselves as a conflict known today as the Social War. In the immediate lead-up to this war, a tribune named Marcus Livius Drusus attempted to resurrect some of the ideas of Gaius Gracchus, particularly with regards to Roman citizenship for the Italian peoples allied to Rome. Ironically, this Drusus was the son of the elder Drusus of the same name who had been selected by the Senate to promise even more to the common people than Gaius Gracchus, thus undermining support for him. Like the Gracchi, Drusus was able to make some headway in the redistribution of land to the poorer citizens of Rome. However, again like his predecessors, he encountered virtually no popular support for the extension of citizenship to non-Romans.

Drusus, however, may have been playing a dangerous political game of his own. According to some accounts, he had secured the almost universal support of the people of Italy beyond Rome, with an

understanding that, if he could somehow maneuver around the Roman system and gain enough support for his citizenship proposal, the Italic peoples would rally behind him as their leader as soon as they were given their rights as citizens. Had this happened, Drusus would, for all intents and purposes, have become the unilateral leader of the Roman world, as such a massive group of voting citizens would have ensured that he and those he endorsed could have held whatever elected offices they desired. Modern historians have questioned whether or not such a formal agreement really existed, or whether this was simply the perceived result of the extension of citizenship to the Italic allies through the actions of Drusus. Whatever the case may be, Drusus was disavowed by Rome once the supposed conspiracy had come to light. The legislation he had already passed during his term was retroactively struck down, and he himself was assassinated shortly thereafter. With their last, best hope for citizenship through legislation defeated, the Italians decided to initiate a war with Rome.

The peoples of Italy thus began preparations for a general revolt against Rome. The peoples of the former Latin League, being tied so closely to Rome, did not participate. However, throughout most of the rest of Italy (including once again, unsurprisingly, the Samnite groups) plans were made. Though Rome kept an eye on the regions in which unrest was prevalent, its leadership did little to prepare for the coming war, perhaps not being aware of how advanced the plans for the rebellion of the Italics were. By the end of 91 BCE, however, a highly organized revolution was in full swing on the Italian Peninsula. At

least 120,000 soldiers were drawn from the states of the revolting former allies, many of whom had been trained in perhaps the most effective way possible to fight a land war: through former service with the Roman army itself.

Before the war escalated, the confederacy of states allied against Rome offered it a quick and peaceful end to the war. If Rome would grant citizenship to those in revolt, the states would immediately make peace and return at once to their former amenable relations with Rome. The Romans, however, had no interest in such a proposal. Temporarily setting aside the differences that had existed within the Roman system for decades, the people of Rome united and resolved to return the allies to Roman control by force, even though this would be a great feat even with the military power of Rome.

By 90 BCE, fighting was occurring throughout much of the Italian Peninsula. Gaius Marius, military hero that he was, was brought back into active command in order to deal with the allies, though health concerns would prompt him to withdraw before the conclusion of the war. An army sourced from Iberia, the Celtic regions of northern Italy and Gaul and even Numidia was assembled to pad the numbers of the Roman army, now deprived of several of its key military allies. This first year of the war saw the momentum carried by the rebels, though they did not and likely could not attack Rome directly. Several armies in the field were, however, defeated, and for a brief time it appeared as if even the Etruscans and the people of Umbria might have been

considering abandoning the Romans in favor of the rebels (though this did not ultimately come to pass). In Rome, a public witch-hunt was carried out for anyone who may have been connected to the alleged conspiracy of Drusus, possibly as a front to keep the anger of the populace fresh and the war effort a point of agreement within the divided Roman classes.

In order to keep the rebellions contained, an extension of citizenship was made to all of those areas that had not risen up against Rome. This included the Etruscans and Umbrians, and probably accounted for their reluctance to enter the war on the side of the rebels. Across 89 BCE, the tide began to turn in favor of the Romans, a fact that was in part due to the efforts of a rising commander by the name of Lucius Cornelius Sulla, better known simply by the mononym Sulla. As a commander, Sulla was without doubt one of the foremost Romans of his time, being able to achieve victory against the rebels while others struggled. He had served in several wars before, including the Cimbrian War, but truly distinguished himself in the Social War. So great were his efforts that, in 88 BCE, he was elected as consul. It was also Sulla that would fight the Samnites, who even at this late date were among the fiercest opposition faced by Rome during the Social War. The Social War ended soon afterward, as the Italian rebels could no longer support the war effort. It had, however, produced two important developments. The first was the extension of citizenship beyond Rome, as the allies of Rome that had not rebelled were offered its privileges and benefits. The second was the ascent of Sulla to the

status of a national hero. For his efforts during the war, he was awarded the highest military honor possible in Rome, the Grass Crown. Unlike other honors, this award was conferred by the army itself for a commander whose actions had saved it from destruction. Only 9 men, among them such names as Publius Decius Mus, Quintus Fabius Maximus and Scipio Africanus, received the honor during the whole of known Roman history.

Sulla, however, would soon find himself in opposition to the leadership of Rome itself. After his victories in the Social War, the consul was selected by the Senate to head to modern Turkey, where the king of Pontus, Mithridates IV, had begun a rebellion of Greek city-states in Asia Minor. However, Marius, now apparently recovered from his health problems, had sought the command for himself. Through his influence, he attempted to have Sulla's command revoked. Circumstances escalated, eventually leading to a riot and an attempt on the part of several members of the aristocracy to kill Sulla himself, who narrowly escaped the city with his life. Now, for the first time, the role of the class of professional soldiers would truly come into play. Sulla fled to Campania, where the army he had commanded during the Social War was still encamped. This army, more loyal to him than to the Senate or any other body in Rome itself, took from Sulla perhaps the most extraordinary command any general in Roman history had yet issued to his soldiers: to march on Rome itself.





*Illustration 21: Bust of Sulla*

Breaking one of the most venerable laws of Rome, Sulla led his army into the city itself, where a minor battle broke out between his legions (totaling 35,000 men, though not all entered the city initially) and a force assembled by Marius to drive them out. This force was hideously insufficient, and by the end of the day had been completely driven out, along with Marius himself and several of his allies. Sulla, in a move that would fan the flames of class tension within Rome to even greater heights, instituted a series of reforms that would leave the aristocracy in virtually absolute control of the city, reinstating the grip

on power held by the upper echelons much earlier in Roman history. After decades of challenges to its power beginning with the Gracchi and populist sentiment among the commoners, the aristocratic Senate was now as firmly entrenched in power as it had ever been.

To his credit, Sulla left the city soon after having instituted these reforms, departing to take command in Asia as he had initially been ordered by the Senate to do. The war he fought there would be the first in a series of three Mithridatic Wars in which Mithridates IV would attempt to wrest the east from Roman control. These wars would last until 63 BCE, when Mithridates himself died and a decisive Roman victory over himself and his allies was established. Sulla, in usual fashion, commanded expertly and achieved victory in the First Mithridatic War, though that victory would not be a lasting one over the King of Pontus. Back in Rome, however, matters did not so favor Sulla.

When he had departed for Asia, Sulla had been in control of Rome for only a very short time, making his venture eastward a dangerous matter for his base of power in the city. To secure himself, he had left the city under the authority of two consuls he himself had picked and a Senate he had refilled with those suitable to his own political and military goals. The consuls, Lucius Cornelius Cinna and Gnaeus Octavius, were not up to the task of running Rome, and it was not long before the two split from each other. Cinna, for his part, effectively betrayed Sulla and called for the return of Marius. Octavius

remained loyal, but was left with little support outside of the Senate. Marius, along with his son of the same name, soon came back to Rome and engaged in a ruthless punishment of those who had sided with Sulla. Marius retook control of Rome by using an army of slaves and mercenaries to cut off the city, effectively keeping it from bringing in fresh food and supplies until he was reinstated.

After Marius returned, the supporters of Sulla were largely put to death, a fate that included Octavius. Marius was given a seventh consular term in 86 BCE. This consulship lasted for only a few days, but was one of the bloodiest periods in Roman history to that time with regards to political violence inside the city. Many were killed by the orders of Marius, and even the most senior and respected leaders of Rome were not exempt. If Sulla had taken Rome by force, Marius had outmatched him by taking Rome through both force and fear. Fortunately for Rome and all those living within its walls, the seventh consulship of the man who had once been Rome's greatest military hero was incredibly short-lived. Less than three weeks after his investiture as consul, he died, leaving Rome much the worse off for his brief and violent return.

After the death of Marius, Cinna became the primary leader within Rome, though the Senate was still more or less in favor of Sulla. This situation would last until 84 BCE, when soldiers under Cinna mutinied and killed their commander. He had, however, succeeded in creating an army numbering perhaps as many as 100,000 legionnaires to

defeat Sulla when he returned from Asia, which he would in 83 BCE. When Sulla returned, however, even this force was insufficient to stop him. Armies were dispatched to defeat him, but ultimately ended up defecting to his own forces rather than attack a military hero of Rome. Again, we see the effect of the Marian reforms at work in making generals such as Sulla more influential with the military than even the legislative bodies of Rome. Meanwhile, other members of Sulla's former support base rallied to him. Of these, few would become more prominent than a young military leader named Marcus Licinius Crassus, who was soon to become one of the most powerful men in the last days of the Roman Republic.

In Rome, Marius the Younger, son of Gaius Marius the Elder, had attained the rank of consul and continued his father's policies with the assistance of his colleague Gnaeus Papirius Carbo. These two consuls, however, were unable to match Sulla's allies in the field as the general himself approached Rome. In a last spiteful effort, the order was given for all of Sulla's supporters that could be found to be put to immediate death. This shocking move included even the current Pontifex Maximus, the supreme priest of Rome and its highest religious authority. Even this, however, did nothing to stop Sulla from retaking the city. In 82 BCE, the general and former consul entered the city at the head of his legions for the second time, retaking it and once again assuming supreme power. This time, that power would be more formal. In order that no other could resist him, he assumed the role of dictator, a position he filled throughout 81 BCE.



*Illustration 22: Marus Licinius Crassus, one of Sulla's most trusted generals*

Across his dictatorship and a second consulship that occurred in 80 BCE, Sulla continued to push for the return of Patrician rule and a more conservative, anti-populist system for Roman law, military practices and social systems. Despite his ambitious plans, he would not last long in his newfound power. Sulla had not been a young man when he rose to prominence, and decided to retire following his second consulship. The Senate and the Patrician class were, for the

time being, entrenched in power more firmly than they had been before the time of Sulla, but the deeper tensions were still fresh in the minds of the commoners. Sulla would not live to see the final outcomes of his reforms, as he died in 78 BCE.

From the time of Sulla, however, had emerged three men who would one day reshape the Roman world. The first was Sulla's general Marcus Licinius Crassus, who had been loyal to him for much of his career. The second was an incredibly able general, outshining even Crassus, named Pompey, whose military achievements in Sulla's service had been so respected that he had been allowed to marry Sulla's own daughter. The last was an unusual addition, a man who had stood against Pompey when Sulla had been the prevailing political power in Rome. This man was the nephew of Gaius Marius, the son-in-law of Cinna and among the political opponents who had lost virtually everything when Sulla had returned to Rome. He, even more than the others, however, would achieve worldwide renown in both his own time and in every era of history since. This man was Julius Caesar.

Before these three men would reach the zenith of their power, another unusual event would occur in Roman history. Up to this point, slave rebellions had been far from unusual. Indeed, two had turned into full-fledged wars, called the First and Second Servile Wars. The next one, however, would reach a scale never before seen in a slave revolt. This Third Servile War would introduce a well-known

historical figure named Spartacus, who would be the leader of a group of gladiatorial slaves that would wreak havoc in Italy before finally being defeated.

The Third Servile War began with an incredibly minor event during which gladiators at a training school in Capua attacked and killed their overseers, allegedly after an escape plot was discovered among the gladiators. Not long after, the freed gladiators from the school were met with a very small Roman force which had been sent to put an end to their looting of the countryside. These gladiators had armed themselves from the arsenal available at the school, and were able to defeat the minor Roman force, as all of them were highly trained in both hand-to-hand and armed combat techniques. This incident drove the uprising into a large-scale event, in which the gladiators would free other slaves in order to recruit them into the ranks of a growing slave army. Given the number of slaves in Italy at the time that could have potentially been recruited, it was seen as critical to stop this uprising quickly.

Though the slave revolt was taken seriously, the army of gladiators, now under the leadership of a slave named Spartacus and with another named Crixus possibly sharing joint command, was sorely underestimated. The slave army had decided to take up positions on Mt. Vesuvius, the famous (then-dormant) volcano that would later engulf the city of Pompeii during an eruption. A militia of some 3,000 men was assembled to attack the rebel slaves, and that force

established a perimeter at the bottom of the path down Mt. Vesuvius, effectively trapping the slaves. However, the rebels were far more resourceful than the Romans gave them credit for. The slaves wove ropes from vines they found growing on the side of the mountain and descended behind the Roman army. With elements of the slave army now in front of and behind the Roman militia, there was no escape, and the force was destroyed.

By the end of 73 BCE, the rebels under Spartacus had proven themselves capable of defeating small Roman forces quite effectively. The next stage of the war would begin in 72 BCE, by which time the slave army was truly massive, with ranks swelled with freed slaves from throughout Italy. Crixus, Spartacus' joint commander, appears to have broken off with his own army of about 30,000, and was defeated in early 73 BCE in Apulia. The force under Spartacus, which may have been as large as 120,000 (though this may be an exaggeration) moved in exactly the opposite direction, going north. Spartacus may have meant to attack Rome, but it is also possible that he planned to simply leave Roman territory by crossing the Alps and resettling in mainland Europe. Whatever his plan may have been, however, Roman legions would soon bar his advance northward.

Two battles, this time with full consular armies, would occur as Spartacus and his men (most of whom, like himself, are reported to have been of Thracian extraction) moved north. In both of these battles, the ever-growing slave army handily defeated Roman legions.



One battle took place fairly far to the north, in the region called Cisalpine Gaul. If Spartacus planned to exit Italy and make his way out of Roman territory, his opportunity was very much present after the victory in the north. However, for reasons that remain unknown and have been a matter of scholarly debate down through the ages, Spartacus and his army turned back south, going back the way they had come. It is possible that the slaves, having now defeated large consular armies, decided that they should remain in Italy and defeat the Romans decisively (though it is difficult to fathom what line of reasoning might have led them to the conclusion that such a victory could be achieved or why a certain pathway to freedom would be given up for such a costly endeavor that was unlikely to result in success). For whatever reason, however, the armies turned back into Italy. Now, Rome was faced with a large and successful army ravaging its own heartland.

In order to put down the rebellion, Crassus was given command of 40,000 or more men with orders to defeat Spartacus and his army. Crassus, one of the ablest commanders of his time alongside Pompey, was a very different breed of general than the consuls that the slave army had met before. In 71 BCE, when Spartacus attempted to move back to the north, Crassus and his armies met the rebelling slaves somewhere in central or west-central Italy. At this battle, a hasty engagement begun by one of the sub-commanders under Crassus prevented the general's overall plan for the battle from materializing properly. Even so, a significant victory was scored for the Romans,

who suffered much lower casualties than the slave army. Moreover, the defeat sent Spartacus back to the south, retreating once again from the northward course he had pursued initially. Crassus now had the momentum in the war, and would seek another engagement to finish off Spartacus.

The freed slaves moved to the extreme south of Italy, where Spartacus planned to make a sea crossing to Sicily in order to recruit more slaves there. However, the ships he had hired to transport himself and elements of his army there were pirate vessels, now a common sight in the Mediterranean thanks to the collapse of Carthage and the rapid decline of the Seleucid Empire, both of which had been more major naval powers than Rome. The pirates accepted payment, but sailed without Spartacus or his men, leaving the slave commander trapped in the south of Italy with Crassus rapidly pursuing him.

As Crassus and Spartacus prepared for battle in southern Italy, two more armies, one under Pompey and the other under a commander named Lucullus, were approaching to help Crassus end the war. Neither commander, however, wanted to wait for these armies to arrive. Spartacus would have no hope of victory against three Roman armies, and Crassus would lose the recognition of putting down the slave revolt if that success had to be shared with Pompey, an already better-known commander who was returning from yet another successful campaign in Spain at the time. Several units of the slave army attempted to break through Crassus' lines to their own detriment

in an attempt to flee. Spartacus' army was coming apart, and there was no choice for him but to engage Crassus.

The final conflict between the two armies would come at the Battle of the Siler River, in the far south of the peninsula. In order to reach Crassus, Spartacus and his men had to fight past a massive blockading series of obstacles established by Crassus to contain the slave army. When the slaves reach Crassus, they had already fought a series of minor skirmishes, resulting in a less than entirely fresh army (something, no doubt, Crassus had planned quite deliberately).. When the two armies collided, the superior Roman troops under the command of a leading general outmatched the slave army. More than 30,000 slaves were slaughtered in comparison to relatively low Roman casualties. Later, Crassus would order thousands of the slaves who were captured to be crucified as a public example for those who would defy Rome. Crassus had won his victory, and had succeeded in doing so before either Pompey or Lucullus could arrive.



End des Spartacus. Zeichnung von Hermann Vogel.

*Illustration 23: Artistic rendering of the death of Spartacus at the Battle of the Siler River*

With the Third Servile War ended, Crassus assumed an even higher position of fame within Rome as the general who had destroyed Spartacus' army. Pompey, too, was at a high point of power, having succeeded in putting down a rebelling Roman general in Spain who had been fighting for years against the government that Sulla had instituted. In 70 BCE, the two generals were made consuls for their military achievements, setting the stage for the alliance known as the First Triumvirate that they would soon constitute two-thirds of.

Pompey, far more than Crassus, would distinguish himself in the field in the coming years. In 67 BCE, he was granted a three year appointment that gave him complete military command over the

Mediterranean, all coastal regions within 50 miles of the sea and a fleet of 500 ships. The purpose of this unusually large amount of military power invested in a single man for such a long time was to defeat the Cilician pirates, the same pirates who had betrayed Spartacus and who threatened coastal colonies and maritime trade routes. In this action, we see an early sign of the fall of the Roman Republic that was now very close at hand. Though many men throughout the history of Rome so far had enjoyed immense influence, the tradition of keeping men in military power for short periods of time still held sway in most cases. Pompey had already violated this tradition with his extended campaign in Spain, and would now be voted long-term and broad military powers once more, making evident the fact that generals, not senators, tribunes or assemblies, were now the real power of Rome.



*Illustration 24: Famous bust depicting Pompey*

The Cilician pirates were put down within three months, but Pompey would continue his military rule over the Mediterranean for the full three years. Soon, he engaged in the Third Mithridatic War, which had been raging in the east since 74 BCE. In this endeavor, he was granted even greater power, being given the ability to conduct treaties and declare war or peace as he saw fit, effectively giving him the powers of a military monarch in the eastern sphere. In this acquisition of power, Pompey was supported by the famous Roman orator,

statesman and historian Cicero, who spoke out publicly in favor of the concentration of power in the person of Pompey. Using the cover of the Third Mithridatic War, Pompey went far beyond the objective of defeating Mithridates once and for all. Securing the support of king Tigranes of Armenia, Pompey began a massive invasion of regions far beyond the normal Roman boundaries of influence.

Beginning in 65 BCE, Pompey began to annex parts of the Near East, including Syria and Judea, regions where Roman armies had been in previous wars but in which no Roman authority had ever been established. In addition to these regions, the areas to the south of the Black Sea and around parts of the Caspian Sea were added to Roman territory. Pompey also created several new provinces during his campaigns in the east, bringing more and more of the eastern world under the direct control of Rome.

By the time Mithridates died in 63 BCE after years of fighting the Romans fairly successfully, the eastern world that he had sought to control was now largely in the hands of Rome due to the efforts of Pompey. That same year, Cicero, who had risen through the ranks of Roman political society by his ardent support of Pompey, attained the position of consul in yet another show of the growing influence of Pompey. While Pompey's supporters rallied in Rome, however, a conspiracy was growing within the disaffected groups that Sulla had defeated that would once again threaten the city itself.

Running against Cicero in the consular elections the previous year had been an unsuccessful candidate named Catiline. During 63 BCE, when the consular elections for the year 62 were held, Catiline was once again denied the office he coveted. Among the ruling leaders of Rome at the time, Catiline carried little favor, as he was an offshoot of the populist tradition begun by the Gracchi a generation earlier. Among his proposals was one that would have likely undermined the internal economy of Rome, which was a widespread forgiveness of debts (an issue that, centuries after the Plebians briefly seceded from Rome, was still a major source of public contention).

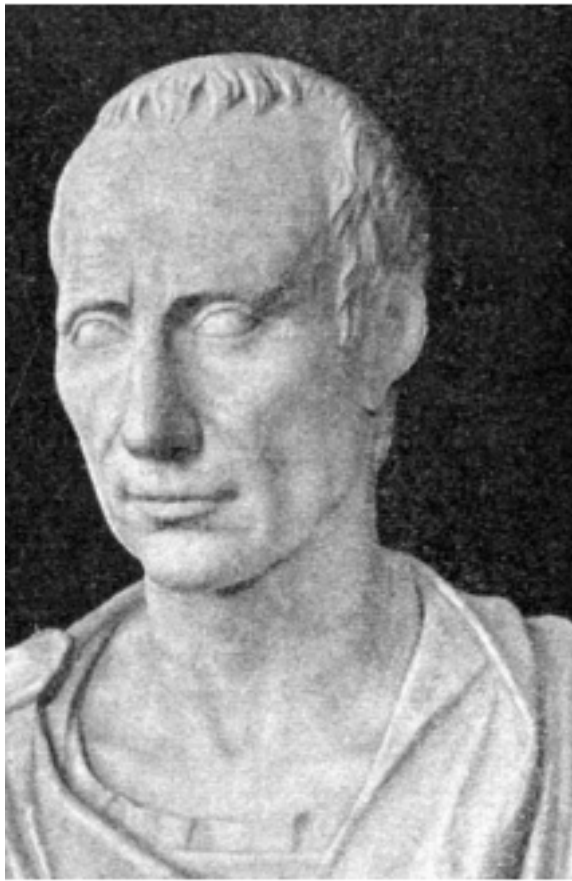
Having lost the elections, Catiline, through his supporters, began assembling an army of the remaining supporters of the late Marius who were still opposed to the government Sulla had established in Rome. The plan was for Catiline to arrange for the army to be let into the city, whereupon it would take over Rome for him. Cicero, however, found out about the plot and was able to have Catiline driven from the city and most of his supporters in Rome arrested. Later, the army that Catiline had raised, while trying to escape to the north, was defeated, and Catiline himself killed.

The next major development in Roman history would occur in 60 BCE. Julius Caesar, who had through the previous several years risen to a position of relative prominence in Rome, had returned from a posting in Spain and intended to put himself forward as a consular candidate. Pompey, at the time, was engaged in a dispute with the



Senate regarding his actions in the east. Though he had been granted virtually unilateral authority there, his creation of provinces and making of treaties far beyond the necessity of the military objective of defeating Mithridates was called into question. Crassus, meanwhile, maintained his position as a rival of Pompey. Through means that are not today fully understood, Caesar, occupying a political sphere very unlike those of the other two, reconciled the interests of Pompey and Crassus, inserting himself as an ally of both. The three, realizing that they could achieve more together than separately, allied to each other, forming the First Triumvirate.

The First Triumvirate, contrary to some popular belief, had no formal basis. Instead, it was merely an alliance of three of Rome's most powerful men for political benefit. This Triumvirate demonstrated its effectiveness in 59 BCE, the year of Caesar's consulship, during which the three men, headed by Julius Caesar himself, successfully ensured passage of a land redistribution bill that would allocate public lands to veterans and the poor at virtually no expense to the state. Through the support of all three men with very different political circles of allies, practically anything could be accomplished in Rome.



*Illustration 25: Gaius Julius Caesar, the principle architect of the First Triumvirate*

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Beginning in 58 BCE, Caesar began his famous Gallic Wars, during which he would subjugate most of Celtic Europe, southern regions inhabited by the Germanic tribes and even parts of Celtic Britain, extending Roman authority over practically all of Europe. For purposes of brevity, we will touch only briefly on these campaigns, to which full justice cannot be done in short form. Though Rome had

little formal presence in Gaul, it had allied with several of the southern Gallic tribes in order to protect its borders. It was at the behest of these allies that Caesar ventured beyond the Alps in 58 BCE to engage the Helvetii, a group of Gallic tribes that were in the process of migrating south and east across Europe.

The Aedui, one of the tribes allied to Rome in Gaul, joined with Caesar and fought with him in two major battles, the Battle of the Saone and the Battle of Bibracte. In both instances, Caesar's battlefield aptitude and foresight in deploying his troops set the Roman army in superior positions to its Celtic adversaries. After Bibracte, the Helvetii were all but destroyed. Though the immediate threat had been dealt with, Caesar now saw a chance to grab off the lands of central Europe from their Celtic natives.

In 57 BCE, Caesar continued his conquests of Europe, subjugating the Belgae (the people for whom the modern nation of Belgium, their former homeland, is named) and their allies. Through his expeditions in 57 and 56 BCE, Caesar managed to establish for Rome a general authority over large parts of modern-day France and central Europe. By 56 BCE, this included extension of Roman power to the coast of the Atlantic Ocean and the construction of a small fleet to be stationed there.

Meanwhile, back in Rome, Pompey and Crassus had kept the power of the First Triumvirate in force while their companion acquired more

and more land beyond the Alps. Pompey's power, still growing, had been increased by a food shortage, resulting in a bill being passed to give him authority over the distribution of grain. This allowed Pompey to make himself even more popular among the common people than he had already been, giving him nearly universal support in Rome. Some cracks, however, were beginning to appear in the facade. The Senate had grown wary of Pompey, concerned with the authority he had gained in Rome. Even Crassus had begun to criticize Pompey, though there is some chance that this was meant to publicly show that the two were not working together in all matters. Caesar, also, had drawn criticism for his extended campaign in Gaul.

In 56 BCE, the three members of the political alliance met at Luca, in northern Italy, where Caesar's army had made winter camp. There, they planned the future of the Triumvirate. The plan they hit upon was to have both Pompey and Crassus elected consuls in 55 BCE, something that would not be difficult to arrange. With that accomplished, each of the three would be granted a five year command (arranged through proposals from supporters) in a major Roman territory. Caesar would continue to command the conquest of Gaul, Pompey would take north Africa and all of Spain, and Crassus would be sent to Syria. Under these conditions, the First Triumvirate would collectively control most of the military might of Rome while their supporters kept peace in the city.

By 55 BCE, these plans had been carried out (though some accounts

suggest that the plan had not been made at Luca, but instead created *ad hoc* as events allowed). In 55 and again in 54 BCE, Caesar launched unsuccessful incursions into Britain that did not leave Rome in any kind of general control of the island. In 54, Caesar was forced to leave Britain and begin to put down a series of revolts in Gaul against Roman power, which were probably a result of his failure to secure his power there before sailing his legions across the English Channel and into Britain. In 52 BCE, Caesar fought against the Gallic rebel king Vercingetorix, who was probably the single most legitimate threat to Roman power in Gaul that had ever arisen. In a fascinating battle at the fortified city of Alesia, Caesar built what amounted to an entire city wall around the existing city, preventing the Gallic forces there from escaping (a tactic that the astute reader will notice goes back to a very similar one used during the early Republic's wars in Italy).

Even as Caesar was continuing his subjugation of Gaul, however, the Third Triumvirate came to an abrupt end in 53 BCE with the death of Marcus Licinius Crassus. Having taken his post in Syria as arranged, Crassus had decided to make war on the Parthian Empire, the successor state to the Seleucid Empire that now controlled Mesopotamia and Iran. Crassus, possibly to increase his own personal wealth (which was immense, even by the standards of high-born Roman leaders) or to ensure that his own land gains matched those of Caesar, took his armies into northern Mesopotamia, where he encountered a Parthian army under the general Surena at the Battle of Carrhae.

Carrhae is perhaps the most incredible example of the use of a cavalry force in battle that predates the time of Genghis Khan. Surena came to the battle with only 10,000 cavalry (only 1,000 of which were heavy cavalry, with the rest composed of light archers), which he deployed against perhaps as many as 50,000 Roman legionnaires. By keeping their distance and using volleys of arrows to eliminate Roman soldiers from afar, the Parthians pinned down the Roman army and killed off thousands of its members while incurring only minor casualties of their own. The heavy cavalry was used to attack the Roman lines only once they had been worn down with volley after volley of arrows. By the end of the day at Carrhae, the Roman army stood badly defeated. Crassus retreated to Carrhae, a nearby town for which the battle was named. His son, Publius Licinius Crassus, had been killed in the fighting or committed suicide to avoid that fate.

Crassus met with ambassadors from Surena the next day. The Parthians, however, killed him and most of his generals during the meeting, leaving the Roman troops that managed to escape the slaughter without leadership. Syria was taken over by an assistant of Crassus, but western Asia was now in danger from a Parthian Empire that realized it could successfully defeat even very large Roman armies. In the end, Crassus had attacked too large a foe, and had paid the price for it with his own life.

With Crassus dead and Caesar in the remote regions of Europe,

Pompey became the *de facto* head of state in Rome. In 50 BCE, he induced the Senate to recall Caesar and to order the disbanding of the legions under him. According to Pompey, Caesar had committed treason by remaining in Gaul with his armies active past the end of the war. The result was perhaps one of the most famous events in the whole of Roman history: Caesar's Civil War.

In 49 BCE, Julius Caesar led a single legion, the Thirteenth, toward Italy. Between himself and Rome lay the Rubicon, a river boundary that Roman law forbade any commander leading armies outside of Italy from crossing with his legions to prevent powerful armies and their commanders from moving through Italy unchecked. Caesar, however, violated the law and crossed the Rubicon declaring more clearly than any written or spoken word could have his intent to make civil war against Pompey, his one time ally. Though the tale may be apocryphal, a famous anecdote suggests that as he took his first step across the river, Caesar proclaimed “*Alea iacta est*,” commonly translated as “the die is cast” but more properly “let the die be cast.”



CROSSING THE RUBICON.

*Illustration 26: 19th century artist's rendering of Caesar and the Thirteenth Legion crossing the Rubicon*

In Rome, panic arose as soon as it became known that Caesar, a commander who had proven himself time and again in Gaul, was marching on the city to depose Pompey. Believing that he could not defeat Caesar (and, to be fair, probably not aware that only one legion had accompanied him back from Gaul), Pompey and most of his senatorial supporters retreated to Capua, while Caesar advanced through Italy. Although he had defied Roman law, Caesar was welcomed back by most of the Italian provinces, and indeed still had much support in Rome itself. The one formal army that was sent to stop him while Pompey raised troops in the south was easily defeated, and the levies that had been raised in many cities joined his forces to fight against Pompey. Left with no choice but to try to raise an army outside of Italy, Pompey left the peninsula in 49 BCE, retreating to the Greek city of Epirus.



Rather incredibly, Caesar chose to march out of Italy, having effectively secured it, and go to Spain, where a major army dedicated to Pompey was still in control. He met this army at the Battle of Ilerda in mid-49 BCE. This battle, though long and drawn out, resulted in the surrender of the Spanish legions to Caesar with virtually no casualties on either side, another significant victory given that Pompey had, not long before, been the governor of Spain. With Spain and Italy subdued, Caesar returned to Rome. Here, he briefly allowed himself to be appointed as dictator, though only to ensure his election for another term as consul. In this brief dictatorial episode, another great figure of Roman history would emerge in the form of Caesar's chosen second in command, Mark Antony.

With his consulship secured, Caesar next planned to pursue Pompey into Greece. In southern Italy, he began to rally his forces for an invasion. However, Pompey had not been idle while Caesar put down his allies in Spain. Instead, he had assembled a large army of his own from legions stationed in Greece and Macedon. In a move unusual in Mediterranean warfare, Caesar mobilized his troops at the outset of the winter months, landing his fleet in Illyria in early winter at the end of 49 BCE. Pompey had already decided that his best strategic option was to engage Caesar, hoping to defeat his former ally and use the legions he had at his disposal to restore order.

Caesar, however, had failed to account for his supply lines (an unusual oversight, given his usual military prowess). Pompey still had

command of the eastern fleet, a much larger naval force than Caesar could muster. Once Caesar had arrived to meet Pompey, his supply lines were rapidly cut off by his enemy's navy, making it difficult for him to obtain fresh supplies or troops from Italy. Luckily for Caesar, Mark Antony was still in Italy, and eventually managed to circumvent the naval block, landing with an additional four legions to reinforce Caesar.

In mid-48 BCE, the combined forces of Caesar and Antony arrived at a stronghold Pompey had established at the city of Dyrrhachium and began a siege of the defenses. Once again employing the tactic of building large fortifications on the battlefield as he had in Gaul, Caesar built an extended wall to prevent Pompey from moving forward. Pompey, ever the military tactician, responded by building another wall, locking the two armies in a stalemate. Caesar, however, had made an error in his deployment by not heavily reinforcing an area where his wall met the sea. This space, though guarded, was the perfect target for Pompey. Sending a simultaneous land and sea attack to punch a hole in Caesar's defenses at their weakest point, Pompey managed to change the entire dynamic of the battle, bringing it around to his favor.

Once Pompey had broken through the lines, the battle was decided. Caesar's army fought for every inch of ground, but was ultimately overwhelmed by sheer force. Pompey had won the first battle, demonstrating that even against a commander as able as Caesar he

was not a general to be trifled with. Caesar, deciding to extract himself from the immediate area in which Pompey might attack him before his army could recover, moved southward into Greece, eventually arriving in the central Greek region of Thessaly.

There, in August of 48 BCE, the two greatest leaders in Roman history to date would do battle to decide the fate of Rome itself. Pompey, urged into action by the senators who still accompanied him, engaged Caesar near the town of Pharsalus, from which this historic battle takes its name. To the north of both camps lay the Enipeus River, against which Pompey's right flank and Caesar's left were anchored. On the opposite flank of each respective army from the river, cavalry units were massed, with long infantry lines stretching from the cavalry to the river. The cavalry flank, in particular, was important because Pompey held a massive cavalry advantage over Caesar. Unbeknownst to Pompey, however, Caesar had hidden an additional line of infantry behind his own cavalry for support against the greater mobile force of Pompey.

Pompey fought the battle cautiously and conservatively, forcing Caesar's army to march toward his own static lines in order to engage. Pompey's cavalry attacked when Caesar's cavalry and infantry had drawn in close enough. Had they been able to turn Caesar's right flank by routing his cavalry and then swing around behind his own lines, it almost certainly would have ensured victory for Pompey. However, Caesar's preparations paid off. When Pompey's cavalry engaged, they

found little resistance among Caesar's. It was not until they had pushed back the smaller cavalry force that the additional infantry revealed itself and began to thrust at the horses of Pompey with spears and javelins, killing many and sending many others into a retreat.

The defeat of Pompey's cavalry left his army in disarray, and Caesar took advantage of this by committing his reserves into a full attack on the enemy infantry. Pompey was unable to recover from the unexpected cavalry defeat, and his armies ended up in a retreat. His army was badly beaten, and the conflict between the two men had been decided in favor of Caesar. The government of Sulla, which had favored the aristocracy and the veneer of Rome's ancient institutions, was ousted. Pompey would flee to seek safety in Egypt, but would be betrayed by king Ptolemy XIII and assassinated, leaving Caesar as the last man standing of the First Triumvirate, the most powerful man in the Roman world and the undisputed master of Rome's armies.

Though Pompey was dead, the remnants of his armies remained in Egypt, and so it was there that Caesar next went. Upon his arrival there, he would intervene in an internal power struggle between Ptolemy XIII and his sister, wife and co-regent Cleopatra VII. At the time, the two rulers were engaged in a civil war of their own, with Ptolemy having driven Cleopatra out of Egypt for a time. When Caesar arrived in the city of Alexandria, he was immediately displeased with Ptolemy, who is reputed to have offered him the severed head of Pompey as a welcoming gift, believing that Caesar would be grateful

for Pompey's murder (in fact, this action alone may have determined Caesar's next actions). Afterward, Caesar immediately decided to support Cleopatra and remove Ptolemy from the throne.

In 47 BCE, Caesar fought with Cleopatra's armies at the Battle of the Nile, utterly wiping out Ptolemy's army and establishing the queen, who by now had also become his lover, as the new ruler of Egypt. Caesar would go on to father an illegitimate son with Cleopatra during the time after the battle, but would soon leave Egypt to continue his campaigns. In Asia Minor, a king named Pharnaces, the son of Mithridates IV, had started an uprising in Pontus and the surrounding areas against Roman rule, believing he could regain autonomy while the Romans engaged in civil war. Caesar left Egypt for Pontus, and before long had destroyed the forces of Pharnaces at a battle known as the Battle of Zela in north-central Turkey. So short and simple was this campaign against Pharnaces, who proved much less able than his father, that Caesar would go on to describe it using the now famous phrase "*veni, vidi, vici*," meaning "I came, I saw, I conquered."

After the war in Pontus, Caesar returned to Italy to rally fresh troops for a war in north Africa, where legions loyal to the late Pompey still held out. The legions then in Italy, however, were owed wages for the campaign in Greece, after which Mark Antony, their commander, had returned to Italy with them while Caesar had marched to Egypt. In a nearly impossible turn, Caesar told the legions there that he would disband them and pay them their entire back wages after he had

returned from north Africa (a complete bluff, as he had nowhere near the forces he needed to fight that campaign without them). Concerned for their own future careers, the soldiers of Mark Antony's legions agreed to go with Caesar without their back pay.

In 46 BCE, Caesar led an invasion force of 55,000 men against Pompey's regrouped allies in Africa, where Marcus Petreius and Metellus Scipio, two high-ranking supporters of Pompey, had joined with Juba, the king of Numidia, in an alliance against Caesar. In late winter, Caesar arrived at the city of Thapsus, where he began a limited siege of the city. However, the forces of his enemies, under the general command of Metellus Scipio, arrived to break the siege. The allied forces under Metellus hoped that war elephants could give them the advantage, but Caesar's troops, battle-hardened veterans, were able to withstand the elephant charge and the cavalry offensives sent against them. Not long after the elephant assault, Caesar's cavalry gained the upper hand, slipping behind the enemy lines. Metellus' lines began to crumble, and it was not long before he and his allies were in a full retreat. Metellus, Juba and Petreius would all commit suicide not long after.

Caesar pressed on to Utica, where the pro-Pompey commander Cato the Younger had refused to engage in battle, but took his own life in order to spare himself the dishonor of defeat, leaving the city freely available to Caesar. The general would soon return to Rome, only to be called back to Spain for one last battle to end the opposition of

those still rallying around the memory of Pompey once and for all. There, two sons of Pompey had allied with a general from Caesar's own command and established Spain as the final outpost of resistance. There, he would fight the Battle of Munda in 45 BCE.

The Battle of Munda is greatly important for introducing two future leaders of Rome. These were Octavian, Caesar's nephew who would soon become the first Roman emperor under the name of Augustus, and Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, who would become a military and political ally and close personal friend of Octavian. At Munda, a force of 40,000 under Caesar, Octavian and Agrippa was able to defeat a force of nearly 70,000 under the sons of Pompey. With their final defeat, the Roman Civil War was over, and Caesar had prevailed entirely.

After Munda, Caesar was granted titles and honors aplenty by the Senate, which was now firmly under his control. Caesar was appointed as dictator for life, giving him virtually unlimited power. Though the Roman Republic is not generally dated to formally end until the beginning of the reign of Augustus, who was the first true emperor, it would not be inaccurate to say that it ended at this point in the mid-40s BCE. Pompey had set the stage for autocratic rule, and Caesar had refined it and taken it to a level that made him, for all intents and purposes but without the title, the monarch of Rome. The Republic would survive for a few more years, but its ancient aim, that of stopping the accumulation of power in the hands of any one

individual beyond a necessary degree, had now totally failed. The Republic, as a set of political ideas, was dead.

Though for life, Caesar's dictatorship would not last long. He would use his power during the short time he had it to restructure many private debts in Rome, begin raising an army for another attack on Parthia and establish new policing and tax policies and allowing for the establishment of the poorest Romans in colonies where they could prosper, pursuing the populist policies that had been suppressed since the time of the Gracchi. In March of 44 BCE, however, Julius Caesar, the man who had resigned Rome to autocratic rule by a single individual once more, would be assassinated.

Though popular with the masses, Caesar was reviled among many of Rome's ruling class, including the richer Plebians, who had lost most of their power to him. The Senate began to fear his total power, worried that it might soon lead to the destruction of itself and the Plebian Assembly, replacing all legislative bodies in Rome with the power of a dictator. Certain leading senators, most notably among them Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus, began to hatch a plan to kill Caesar and restore the Republic. That plan was carried out on March 15, 44 BCE, when Julius Caesar was called to attend a session of the Senate and there attacked by his assassins. Caesar's death, however, only briefly delayed the inevitable.





*Illustration 27: Bust of Marcus Junius Brutus, one of the leaders in the assassination of Caesar.*

After the assassination, the Senate passed a pardon on those who had participated, though the populace was furious and called for harsher action. Mark Antony, Caesar's longtime friend and second in command, came to head up his faction in Rome, but prudently did not press the Senate for the arrest of the conspirators, instead planning to

advance the cause of monarchy more gradually. There was, however, another contender as the heir to Caesar's political power: his nephew, Octavian.

Beginning in 43 BCE, Mark Antony, Octavian and another leading supporter of Caesar named Marcus Aemilius Lepidus formed the Second Triumvirate. This political alliance was more formal than the First Triumvirate, as it no longer had to operate within a context in which concentrated power was discouraged. The alliance was also legally established with the support of the Plebeian Assembly. The Second Triumvirate conferred on its members formalized dictatorial powers, though the three members could move to check each other and the alliance was only legally approved for five years beginning in 43 BCE. Like the original triumvirate, these three leaders would each take command of a portion of the empire, with Lepidus in Spain, Antony in Gaul and Octavian in north Africa.

The east, however, was in danger. Brutus and Cassius, after Caesar's assassination, had fled to Greece and seized control of most of the eastern empire in hopes of preserving the Republic against the rise of Antony and Octavian. In 42 BCE, a massive invasion of the east was launched under those same two members of the Second Triumvirate, resulting in the Battle of Philippi in Macedon. This battle would be one of the largest the ancient world had ever seen, with each army having well in excess of 100,000 soldiers.

When Octavian and Antony arrived at Philippi, Cassius and Brutus had established a firm defensive position that they refused to abandon to pursue an open battle. In order to circumvent these defenses, Mark Antony was forced to extend his right flank through a marshy wetland that ran near to the enemy camp. Cassius, who was in command near the marshes, became aware of Antony's effort to penetrate his lines and ordered a general assault. Meanwhile, Brutus, who commanded the right flank of the Republican rebels, fought with Octavian with devastating success. However, Antony was able to best Cassius. By the end of the day, Brutus had soundly defeated Octavian's forces, but Antony had defeated Cassius, who committed assisted suicide.

The battle stood at a stalemate when the naval forces loyal to Brutus swung around and cut off Octavian and Antony, preventing them from resupplying or calling on reinforcements. However, the conclusion of the battle would not be on that same day. Instead, Antony would gradually extend his lines to encircle Brutus' camp over the next several weeks, until the position of the Republican army was so desperate that it was forced to attack once more. In the ensuing battle, Brutus was at last defeated, and he himself committed suicide rather than be taken prisoner. The revenge for the death of Julius Caesar was, at last, complete.

After Philippi, Antony and Octavian emerged as the two leading members of the Second Triumvirate and began to divide the empire between themselves. Lepidus, meanwhile, was cut out of the alliance

to a large extent, possibly because of suspicions that he had plotted with Sextus Pompey, the son of the First Triumvirate general and one of the two who had fought against Caesar at Munda. Upon his return to Rome, Octavian began a series of unpopular land appropriations forced by the necessity of granting land promised to some 50,000 veterans of the recent war. To do this, he confiscated land from both the upper and lower classes alike, drawing the ire of many in Rome (though, notably, keeping the military satisfied).

With this move, tensions began to grow between Octavian and Mark Antony who, now sharing almost absolute control of Rome, each saw the other as a threat. In time, this conflict would lead to another, though vastly more minor, civil war between Octavian and several close supporters of Antony. Not least among these supporters was Mark Antony's wife, Fulvia, who urged his brother Lucius to raise legions against Octavian. The war was brief, lasting from 41 BCE until 40 BCE, when Octavian's forces were able to trap those of Antony's faction in the city of Perusia and secure a surrender by starvation. Not long after, in a public show of his increasingly antagonistic relationship with Antony, Octavian returned north Africa to Lepidus, establishing him once again as a member of the triumvirate.

In 36 BCE, Sextus Pompey, who had used a fleet of those loyal to the Republic to raid the coasts of southern Italy and even to secure control over Sardinia and Sicily, would use his naval power to hamper deliveries of grain to Rome. Octavian, Antony and Agrippa had

attacked him several times over the course of the preceding years, trying especially to break his control over Sicily. However, a diplomatic solution was next tried. The Treaty of Misenium was agreed upon between Octavian, Antony and Sextus Pompey. By its terms, the younger Pompey would retain control of Sicily and Sardinia as governor and be given a consulship, but would stop his piracy. Though agreed upon, the treaty did not hold. The war was reignited, and Sextus Pompey was executed the following year after having been captured, ridding the Second Triumvirate of one of the very few remaining opposition forces to their absolute power.

Beginning in 36 BCE, Antony made his way to Parthia to once again try to conquer it for Rome, just as Crassus had failed to do. Parthia had invaded Roman Syria in 40 BCE, an attack which Antony, as commander of the east, had had to avenge. By the time of 36 BCE, however, he had decided to strike into Parthian territory directly. To do this, he first had to subdue Armenia, whose loyalties had switched to Parthia after the expedition of Crassus. The king of Armenia surrendered without a fight, realizing he would be unlikely to best the Roman legions. Once Antony entered Parthia, though, he would not be so fortunate.

By late 36 BCE, Antony's Parthian campaign was in utter shambles. Just as Crassus before him, he had been unable to counter the Parthian cavalry tactics and was forced to retreat back into Syria, losing much of his army in the process. Antony would retreat to

Alexandria, where he had already begun a romantic relationship with Cleopatra, still the queen, several years before. Antony would use Egyptian support to continue his campaigns, but would be unable to take Parthia. During this time in the east, however, Antony had made a fateful decision: to sever his alliance with Octavian and effectively rule the eastern half of the empire.

In Rome, Octavian had deposed Lepidus from power after the latter had attempted to seize Sicily for himself after the fall of Sextus Pompey. The attempted resistance went nowhere, and Octavian soon had the leverage he needed to remove Lepidus once and for all. The Second Triumvirate had shattered, with Lepidus exiled and Antony refusing orders recalling him to Rome while remaining with Cleopatra, with whom he had had two children, in the east. In 34 BCE, Antony's split with Rome became more pronounced when he and Cleopatra arranged for the division of lands among their children. Conspicuously, several Roman territories were among the lands to be divided. With this, it became clear that another war would soon be on the horizon for control of the eastern empire.

In 32 BCE, Antony married Cleopatra and had tied himself to her son by Julius Caesar, Caesarion, as the rightful heir of Roman power. Octavian condemned Antony as a traitor, and attempted to sway public opinion against him by pointing out that Antony had married Cleopatra before even formally divorcing his wife Octavia (Octavian's own sister). Antony, in retaliation, used his influence in Rome to

attempt to block Octavian. The effort, however, only divided Rome further. By the end of the year, both consuls and a large portion of the Senate had fled Rome to rendezvous with Antony in Greece, declaring their support for him over Octavian. The stage was set, and the last civil war of the Roman Republic began.

In order to prevent supporters of Antony from rallying against a direct attack on him, Octavian and the Senate declared war on Egypt and on Cleopatra personally, but not on Antony himself. That, however, was ended by Antony, who declared his support for Egypt and committed his legions, still fiercely loyal to him as their commander, to the defense of Egypt. The civil war would be massive, with roughly 200,000 soldiers on each side and several hundred warships comprising the respective Roman and Egyptian fleets.

Antony, in order to safeguard the eastern lands he had carved out for himself and his new wife, chose Greece, rather than Egypt, to be the theater for the war. If he could have defeated Octavian in Greece, Antony could have ended the war without danger to Egypt and left himself in position to attack Italy directly with his victorious forces. The strategy, overall, was a sound one, and one that is telling of the strategic mind of Antony as a commander. However, Antony had missed a critical point. He was ordering Roman soldiers to fight against Roman soldiers in the name of a non-Roman queen. In Rome, nationalistic pride was one of the foundations of the Roman identity, instilled from a young age and valued throughout life. Thus, Antony's

army suffered from morale problems, which were only exacerbated by Cleopatra's presence with the army.

When Octavian mobilized his forces to cross the sea, he put Marcus Agrippa, his long time friend and trusted commander, in charge of the Roman fleet. They met Antony's forces near Actium, a town in western Greece. Octavian took personal charge of the land forces, using them to occupy towns on the mainland that could act as supply bases or defensive positions for Antony. Meanwhile, Agrippa used his navy to blockade Antony inside the Ambracian Gulf, a large body of water into which only a small inlet provided entrance or exit, and keep him from moving his forces. The end of 32 BCE, however, was rapidly approaching, and the campaigning season ceased for the winter.

The first half of 31 BCE saw Octavian consolidate his land power, taking advantage of the fact that Antony could not move his fleet past Agrippa. The latter also used his ships to raid Greek cities allied to Antony. The hope was that Antony would be tempted into moving out of the gulf and attacking the ships of Agrippa. Stuck in a stalemate, Antony, allegedly at the advice of Cleopatra, decided to move through the blockade and return the fleet to Egypt. On September 2<sup>nd</sup> of 31 BCE, his fleet moved out of the gulf, and the Battle of Actium began.





*Illustration 28: 17th century painting imagining Antony's defeat at the Battle of Actium*

Antony was armed with larger, heavier ships, while Agrippa's vessels held the advantage in maneuvering capability (though he had larger ships at his disposal as well). Antony's plan had been to use the larger ships to ram through the naval line of battle set by Agrippa, creating an opening for his fleet to pass through. However, a defecting commander from Antony's camp, one of many low-morale defections, had communicated the entirety of the plan to Agrippa and Octavian. Antony's battle strategy was now thoroughly useless, and his ships were trapped in a narrow space with little ability to maneuver.

The battle was not a complete victory for either side, although Octavian would later portray it as a great victory for himself and Marcus Agrippa. Antony's Roman fleet was almost entirely destroyed. However, his flagships and the bulk of the Egyptian portion of the

fleet managed to escape through a hole opened up in the blockade line during the battle. Antony and Cleopatra returned to Egypt in defeat. This was insufficient for Octavian, who wished to forever defeat Antony and claim the wealth and territory of Egypt for himself in the process. Octavian, bowing to the demands of his soldiers, allowed many of them to retire from the war (as most were veterans of other recent wars as well), but quickly raised a new one to pursue Antony to Alexandria itself.

Over the course of the year 30 BCE, Octavian moved toward Alexandria with the remaining legions under his command, while the legions of Lucius Pinarius Scarpus, Octavian's cousin who had been given a military command in modern Libya, moved to meet him in Egypt. Antony, at one point, unsuccessfully attempted to attack Scarpus, losing most of what was left of his own legions in the process (though many of his soldiers had already defected to Octavian). When the armies converged, Octavian laid siege to Alexandria, which now had little practical hope of defending itself against two Roman armies.

In August of 30 BCE, Mark Antony followed a long tradition of many Roman commanders and committed suicide rather than be captured and executed dishonorably. Caesarion was put to death as a rival of Octavian (being a full-fledged son of Julius, while Octavian was only his blood nephew and adopted son, and therefore a potential threat to Octavian's power). Cleopatra, soon afterward, committed suicide

herself using the poison of a venomous snake, most likely an Egyptian cobra. With Cleopatra's death, the taking of Alexandria and two Roman armies actively in Egypt, the time of Egyptian independence from Rome was ended. Egypt became a province of Rome, vastly increasing the already massive coffers of the empire.

Octavian returned to Rome in 29 BCE. With Lepidus and Antony no longer in power, he was the sole political and military authority of the Roman world. In 27 BCE, that position was made more formal when he relinquished control of all of the provinces and the armies therein to the Senate (a show meant to bolster the public image of democratic rule more than a real giving up of power). Immediately afterward, most of the provinces, save for Illyria, Macedon and those in north Africa, were returned to Octavian's control, along with a number of legions that gave him unilateral military power while maintaining the illusion that the Senate still controlled some legions.

In the same year, Octavian took on the title of Augustus, the name by which he would thereafter be known. The title, voted to him by the Senate, meant “exalted one” or “illustrious one”. This title conveyed a degree of religious authority that set Augustus (as he was now called) above any normal authority in Rome, including the Senate, the Plebeian Assembly, the tribunes or the consuls (though the latter was a position he held annually to ensure his continued executive power). Though his power would increase still further over the course of his reign, the conferring of the title of Augustus is generally regarded by

modern historians as the official ending of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the Roman Empire, with Augustus as the first Roman emperor.

The Republic's long decline, beginning with the tensions that set the Gracchi against the Senate and continuing as the people of Rome pressed more and more for the consolidation of power in popular individuals, had finally culminated in its end. Over were the days of the Punic and Macedonian Wars and the united Rome that had, even earlier, conquered the Italian Peninsula in the Samnite and Pyrrhic Wars. Gone too were the basic ideas of the Republic that had emerged after the overthrow of the monarchy nearly half a millennium before. Across the 500 years of Roman history that is known as the Roman Republic, Rome had grown from a powerful city-state of the Latin League into the master of the known world, ruling an empire that encompassed early the entire Mediterranean, most of Europe and parts of western Asia. Now, the Republic had come full circle, with the establishment of what would prove to be, at least for a time, a hereditary monarchy stemming from Augustus.



*Illustration 29: A famous marble statue depicting Augustus, the first emperor of Rome and its supreme political authority after the fall of the Republic.*

The downfall of the Republic is a complex subject in history, as its causes were deeply ingrained in the social, political, economic and military structure of Rome and its empire. Certainly, the tensions between the Plebians and the Patricians, later expanding to a general

division between the wealthy and the poor (as urban Plebians in Rome itself gathered more wealth) played their role in creating a scenario that populist leaders, such as Pompey, Caesar and Augustus, could exploit to circumvent the power of the aristocracy. Complementing this popular support was the vast military power given to successful generals by the Marian reforms and the subsequent creation of a professional military class within Roman society. This phenomenon would later manifest itself more fully in the Roman Empire after the death of Nero, the last hereditary emperor of the line of Augustus. By the late first century CE, military support would largely decide who was emperor at any given time.

Finally, the demands of an empire played their role in the collapse of the Republic. As Rome expanded, the highly diluted power system that had originally defined the Republic simply was not able to cope with the necessities of maintaining control over an empire. Solutions to this, such as the extension of military command authority to consuls after the ending of their terms and the institution of governors in the provinces, were able to solve this problem in the short run. However, exceedingly talented and ambitious men, such as Pompey and Caesar, had been able to seize upon the necessities of extended power and prevent themselves from losing it, eventually culminating in the massive power of the Second Triumvirate and the sole rule of Augustus as emperor.

# Appendixes

## Appendix A

### Major Offices of the Roman Republic

From the preceding history, it is clear that the Roman Republic was a highly politically organized institution with many different levels of political power. For the sake of brevity and clarity, we have up to this point mostly used the formal names only of offices that are familiar to the average reader, such as consuls and tribunes. Following is a more detailed list of the offices within the Roman Republic, using their proper names and with a more detailed description of their powers and duties.

***Senators:*** As members of the highest legislative body in Rome, senators collectively wielded immense power during the height of the Republic, when the Senate had gained significantly more authority than it held during the early days after the overthrow of the monarchy. The bulk of the powers attributed to the Senate came from its ability to appoint officials who were in charge of various aspects of Roman civic life and its control over the Roman treasury. Individual

senators, however, had comparatively little official power. Prominent members could sway the body through their influence, but the rest of the Senate was always in place to check individual members.

**Consuls:** Under most circumstances during the time of the Roman Republic, the two annual consuls were the men with the most individual power in Rome. Holding the combined executive power that had once been invested in the Roman kings, the consuls were permitted to lead armies on behalf of the Senate and the people of Rome, institute public policies and enforce Roman law and justice. Given the broad scope of their power, combined with the fact that they often commanded armies, Roman consuls held immense authority over the state, a fact that was reflected in the election of two consuls at any one time to prevent complete authority from falling into the hands of either one.

The consuls also occupied an interesting position between the non-elected Senate and the Plebian Assembly. The electoral process for the consuls was one of nomination by the Senate, followed by an electoral ratification by the Assembly. Thus, the consuls were, in a sense, popularly elected, but were closely controlled by the nomination of the Senate. This gave the Senate a great deal of control over who would hold the executive authority, eventually leading to the increasing power of the Senate over Rome as a whole during the early and middle years of the Republic.



As time went on, the controls on the consuls became somewhat less strict, especially with regards to the number and frequency of their terms. This is most obvious in the case of Gaius Marius, who served seven terms as consul, including five consecutive terms (104-100 BCE). As the consulship fell into a position that could be held for extended periods of time by a single individual, the ability of the Senate and the Plebian Assembly to check the consuls diminished. The increased ability of individuals to hold extended power as consuls was one of the first signs of the accumulation of authority in a small handful of people, the very thing that the Republic had been established to guard against.

***Tribunes:*** Though in this work we have principally discussed the office of Plebian tribunes, the roles of various tribunes within Rome were quite diverse. A tribune was, essentially, a magistrate with limited executive and judicial power relative to certain functions. There also existed military tribunes, who held roles as officers within the Roman army. The Plebian tribunes, however, held by far the greatest amount of power. These tribunes were tasked with ensuring that the aristocracy could not oppress the common people. To this end, the Plebian tribunes were granted the power to propose laws to the Plebian Assembly which, if passed, would become binding on all Romans, thus giving them a method of circumventing the power of the Senate. As the Republic went on, the number of Plebian tribunes increased from the original five to a total of ten.

***Praetors:*** Much like tribunes, officials holding the title of praetor could be tasked with a variety of different responsibilities. Most often, the title was used to describe the commander of a non-consular army, making it principally a military title. Despite this being the main usage of the title, praetors could also be magistrates tasked with conducting judicial proceedings under certain circumstances. Under normal circumstances, two military praetors were in office during each year to match the consuls in the event of a military situation in which more than two commanders were needed. Later in the history of the Roman Republic, praetors would come to prominence as military governors of various regions within the rapidly expanding empire. For this reason, the number of praetors increased steadily after the expansion of Roman power throughout the Mediterranean, eventually growing from the original two to a total of 16.

***Censors:*** Another civil office in the Roman Republic was that of the censor, who was tasked with the upholding and enforcement of public morals, as well as conducting official counts of the Roman citizenry and the property of each landed citizen. As the officers in charge of public morality, censors held wide-ranging powers that had few boundaries, even within the private lives of Roman citizens. Though preventing criminal activity was certainly a portion of the censor's job, the greater duty of his position was to keep traditional Roman values guiding both individuals and Rome as a whole. This part of the censor's role is most keenly demonstrated by Cato the Elder, who as censor opposed practically all divergence from the traditional values

that had been in place in Rome since its earliest years.

***Aediles:*** Aediles were among the more minor officials of the Roman Republic, but still had certain important roles within the city itself. As the magistrates in charge of civic works, the aediles oversaw the construction and maintenance of public buildings. This role extended to temples, giving the aediles a minimal though critical affiliation with the city's all-important religious life. The aediles were also responsible for the enforcement of a standardized system of weights and measures in the commercial sector of Rome, ensuring that merchants and vendors sold goods in proper quantities. The latter role would become especially important as Rome began to establish its empire.

***Quaestor:*** Though many offices dealt directly or indirectly with public finance, the quaestors of the Roman Republic were the chief officers in charge of finance and economics within Rome and its various provinces. Each consul, as well as all military governors in the provinces, would be assigned one quaestor to oversee spending and to keep the officials from misusing public funds.

***Dictators:*** By far the most powerful official position within Rome was that of the dictator, whose executive and military powers were effectively absolute. Dictators were usually created in response to some kind of general emergency that called for an all-out response from Rome. Unless such circumstances existed, dictators were not put forward, as they were perceived as having too much power. The role

of dictator can be seen as one that was a temporary replacement for a king during times at which a single guiding authority was needed for Rome to overcome its enemies.

The role of the dictator changed considerably over the course of the Republic. In the early years, dictators were elected for only a single year in order to keep them from wielding their authority for any longer than was necessary for them to accomplish whatever objective had led the Senate to elect a dictator in the first place. By the time Julius Caesar assumed the title, however, the adherence to the principle of keeping power out of the hands of any one individual had declined considerably in Rome. In a sense, this shift in how dictators were perceived would lead to the creation of the office of emperor for Augustus and his successors, as the emperor was more or less a dictator with a lifelong term and only nominal oversight from the Senate and the other council bodies within Rome. Though Rome managed without a monarch for several centuries, the office created to replace the kings in times of dire national emergency would, ultimately, lead back to the creation of another monarchical tradition.

## Appendix B

### Roman Provinces of the Republic

The Roman Republic is notable for having been the period of Rome's history during which it established its presence throughout the Mediterranean, creating a substantial land and sea empire. During this time, many provinces were created so as to establish Roman rule within the lands that were seized from other peoples. Following are descriptions of some of the most important provinces created during the time of the Republic.

***Sicilia:*** Sicilia, the Latin name for Sicily, was the first Roman province ever created, a fact that is unsurprising given the proximity of the island to the Italian Peninsula. Thanks to its rich soil, the island would later become a prime region for wealthy Romans who wished to establish agricultural estates and add to their own wealth in the process. Sicily also served as one of the early contact points between Rome and the Greeks, due to the fact that it had been exposed to Greek civilization and colonization earlier in its history. Sicily would remain an important holding throughout the remainder of Roman history, being both economically productive and politically stable.

***Hispania Ulterior and Citerior:*** Following the Roman entrance into the Iberian Peninsula during its long struggles with Carthage, two major provinces were created. These were Hispania Ulterior (along the southern coast of the peninsula) and Hispania Citerior (eastern coast). Collectively, these two provinces would make up the original Roman Spain. Later on, the remainder of the peninsula would fall under Roman control, though resistance from the native Celtic peoples

would be fierce, especially in the north. Mineral and agricultural wealth from the Spanish provinces would be important for the Roman economy until the collapse of the Roman Empire.

***Macedonia:*** As the previous seat of the Hellenistic Empire, Macedon was a great boon to the Romans after its conquest. The Roman province of Macedonia, however, incorporated both Macedon and the Greek city-states (excluding those on Aegean islands and in Turkey). Thanks to the centuries of Greek civilization that preceded the Roman conquest of Greece and Macedon, the province of Macedonia offered the Romans a wealth of knowledge, treasure and mercenaries. Though cultural interchange between Greece and Rome was already well established long before the creation of the province, trade with Macedonia would ensure that combined Greco-Roman culture continued to permeate the Italian Peninsula. Later, southern Greece would become its own province, known as Achaëa.

***Syria:*** The province of Syria, though certainly remote from Rome, would prove to be one of the bastions of the Roman Empire. Its ancient connection to the peoples of Mesopotamia and the Semitic peoples of the eastern Mediterranean coasts made it one of the cultural centers of the world at the time, and the wealth of Syria was also a welcome addition to Rome's coffers. The importance of this province would increase during Rome's imperial period, as it would be widely seen as the counterpart to Egypt in the east.

***Africa:*** Established from the conquests made after the Punic Wars, the province of Africa encompassed what is today Tunisia, Algeria and parts of Libya. The province of Africa gave Rome access to the immense wealth generated by the Phoenician trade routes that once centered on Carthage. Later, this province would become largely secondary to Egypt, which was the principle Roman center of power on the African continent.

***Gallia Narbonensis:*** Encompassing what is today the southern portion of France, Gallia Narbonensis was the earliest formal province in the region known as Gaul. The presence of a Roman province within the lands of the Celtic peoples of Europe would gradually lead to the creation of a hybrid culture formed from the imposition of Roman societal and religious ideas onto Celtic tribes. Gallia Narbonensis also served as the beachhead for Roman military and political power in central mainland Europe. In time, the Romans would extend their reach over practically all of the continent.

***Corsica et Sardinia:*** Literally meaning “Corsica and Sardinia” in Latin, this province encompassed these two Mediterranean islands. The importance of the islands to the empire would be fairly minimal, though like other regions they would provide trade and a flow of goods for Rome.

***Asia:*** The province of Asia did not come in any way close to matching the geographic region we today know as Asia. Indeed, what

the Romans knew as Asia spanned only the westernmost parts of modern-day Turkey, making it a relatively small province. Despite its geographic size, the province of Asia incorporated many of the Greek cities on the western Turkish mainland, making it a wealthy and fairly powerful province.

***Bithynia et Pontus:*** While Asia spanned the westernmost parts of modern Turkey, the province of Bithynia et Pontus spanned the northern coastal area. Like Asia, Bithynia et Pontus was a fairly minor province that remained stable throughout most of Roman imperial history. Later, the province would be broken down into three smaller provinces, though the practical relations between Rome and northern Turkey would change very little.

## Appendix C

### Time Line of Major Legal and Political Changes in Rome

Owing to the importance of the Republic as a period in which Rome's military power was spread across the Mediterranean, we have thus far focused much more intensely on the history of Rome's wars than on its internal legal changes over the course of the Republic. Following is a brief time line detailing some of the most important changes to Roman



law that occurred over the course of the Roman Republic.

***First Secession of the Plebians (494 BCE):*** The agreement made during the First Secession of the Plebians fundamentally changed the power dynamic within the city of Rome by allowing the Plebians to elect their own representative officials (the Plebian tribunes). By opening up the offices of the Republic to the common people, this event began the long process of equalizing the Plebian and Patrician classes. This secession also established the power of the Plebians within Rome as a necessary economic force, as the secession brought Rome's internal economy to a nearly complete halt.

***Adoption of the Twelve Tables (449 BCE):*** The internal tensions that had produced the struggle between the Patricians and the Plebians would result in several reforms meant to prevent an aristocratic tyranny from being established within Rome. One of the most important of these reforms was the institution of the Twelve Tables, a formal set of procedural laws meant to protect the rights of all Roman citizens. The Twelve Tables were the product of a legislative process that began in or about 450 BCE in which a group of ten leading citizens were chosen to draft a series of laws that would guarantee the basic rights of all Romans. At first, only ten tables of laws, each table probably pertaining to a different type of legal procedure, were put forward, but two were added later on. According to Roman historical tradition, the Twelve Tables were heavily influenced by the legal code of Athens, attesting to the overall cultural influence held by the Greek

city-states over Rome during the early Republic.

***Official Limiting of Terms (342 BCE):*** During the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE, the playing field between the Patricians and the Plebians continued to even out, in part due to the Republic's dedication to the distribution of power. In order to keep this the case, official limits on terms were instituted in 342 BCE. Unlike modern term limit laws, the Roman system regulated the length of time between terms, instituting a one decade period that an elected official was supposed to be out of office before becoming eligible for re-election. Though adhered to for a time, this system ultimately proved unwieldy due to the fact that it effectively prevented even talented leaders from being able to seek re-election within a reasonable period of time.

***Plebiscitum Ovinium (about 312 BCE):*** Though one of the less-known reforms during the Republic, the Plebiscitum Ovinium was an act pushed by the Plebian Assembly that transferred the privilege of naming the members of the Senate from the consuls to the censors, giving the people a slightly greater degree of control over the selection process for the senatorial lists.

***Lex Hortensia (287 BCE):*** The Lex Hortensia, or Hortensian Law, was one of the single largest innovations in the Roman legal system during the Republic. This law, which was introduced at the suggestion of the dictator Quintus Hortensius, for whom it is eponymously

named, made laws passed by the Plebian Assembly binding on all Romans, Plebian and Patrician alike, without the approval of the Senate. More than 150 years later, the Lex Hortensia would become the mechanism by which Tiberius Gracchus would enact his land redistribution program in the face of overwhelming senatorial opposition.

***Sulla's Constitutional Changes (82 BCE):*** From the time of the Gracchi onward, Rome saw relatively few major changes in its legal system, despite the increasing vitriol between the conservative aristocracy and wealthy Plebians and the populist elements of the Plebian class. The Lex Hortensia had given the populists their most effective tool in instituting public policy within Rome, though the Senate remained powerful when it came to the policies dealing with the empire as a whole. Upon coming to power through civil war, Sulla instituted sweeping constitutional reforms meant to alter the balance of power in Rome entirely in the favor of the aristocracy. To this end, Sulla's reforms prevented Plebian tribunes from introducing legislation to the Plebian Assembly, making it difficult for reformers following in the footsteps of the Gracchi to circumvent the Senate. Sulla also pushed for the requirement of ten years between terms be enforced, which it had not been for some time.

Though intended to restore the Republic and save it from populist pressures, Sulla's constitutional reforms had exactly the opposite effect. Not long after Sulla's death, Pompey would begin the process of

accumulating vast amounts of power to himself. Sulla's reforms were so harsh that the populist movement within Rome gained massive support against an aristocracy that, now, was seen as more corrupt than ever. Sulla had also personally set the precedent, by invading Rome, of generals using military power to exercise political authority. Soon, Julius Caesar would carry this principle to its logical conclusion, establishing himself as a dictator with the widespread support of the populists.

## Appendix D

### Short Bibliography of Recommended Further Reading

Though the author has herein attempted to be thorough, it is a testament to the sheer volume of information available about the Roman Republic that this short history is still far from comprehensive. For the reader interested in learning more, there is a wealth of literature that may be used to delve more deeply into the history of Rome prior to its better-known imperial period. Following is a brief bibliography of works recommended to the reader wishing to conduct a deeper study of this fascinating period in the history of Rome.

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books completely preserved).*

## Conclusion and a Brief Word From the Author



*Illustration 30: A modern view from within the Senate building of Rome (built in 44 BCE to replace an earlier counterpart). During the years of the Republic, the Senate was the most important legislative body within all of Rome.*

Though the history of the Roman Republic is frequently overlooked in favor of imperial history (with the notable exception of the last several decades of the Republic which ultimately produced imperial Rome), this phase of history was nevertheless of great importance for Rome and for the Mediterranean world as a whole. From the early wars that led it to achieve hegemonic rule over central Italy to the Pyrrhic and Punic Wars that gradually introduced Roman military power into the broader Mediterranean, the history of the Roman Republic is the history of the growth of Rome itself. This period of history led Rome to achieve military dominance over much of the known world and forged several of the Roman legal traditions that, in

one form or another, would stay with it until the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century CE.

Though the Republic's history ended in the late first century BCE, the influence it thereafter held should not be underestimated. Truly, the collective legacy of the Republic is one that has endured for two millennia. Democracies in Europe have often imitated the Republic's representative form of government, and the Senate itself became the inspiration for the upper house of America's bicameral legislature. The early Republic's institution of citizen soldiers (as opposed to the professional military class that emerged after the Marian Reforms) has also historically been lauded as the ideal model of a military system, so much so that large parts of Niccolo Machiavelli's martial work *The Art of War* are dedicated to describing the difference between the levied citizen armies of antiquity and the professional armies that defined both late antiquity and Renaissance Italy. Rome, being one of the two original sources of political heritage in Europe (the other of course being the various systems of ancient Greece), had a massive influence on the development of later republican systems of government.

In closing, I would like to thank you for having read *The Roman Republic: The Precursor of the Roman Empire*, which I am proud to release as the latest in my series of short histories of the world. It is my sincere hope that you have found it both enjoyable and enlightening and that it has provided a sound understanding of the

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Thank you once again,

*Duncan Ryan*

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*Illustration 27: Carlo Brogi [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.* File URL: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/80/Brogi\\_%2C\\_Carlo\\_%281850-1925%29\\_-\\_n.\\_16585\\_-\\_Roma\\_-\\_Museo\\_Capitolino\\_-\\_Marco\\_Giunio\\_Bruto%2C\\_busto\\_in\\_marmo..jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/80/Brogi_%2C_Carlo_%281850-1925%29_-_n._16585_-_Roma_-_Museo_Capitolino_-_Marco_Giunio_Bruto%2C_busto_in_marmo..jpg)

*Illustration 28: Laureys a Castro (f 1664-1700) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.* File URL: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/95/Castro\\_Battle\\_of\\_Actium.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/95/Castro_Battle_of_Actium.jpg)

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